



# Special Report

Placing social science research at the service of the Church in the United States since 1964

JUNE 2023

## Women’s Religious Institutes Successfully Planning and Funding Members’ Elderly Care

June 2023

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### ■ INTRODUCTION

According to national statistics, women’s religious institutes reported 74,162 members in the United States in 2001, compared to 36,321 members in 2021 – a net decrease of 51%.<sup>i</sup> In 2022, the National Religious Retirement Office reported that among 390 responding women’s religious institutes only 7% (26 institutes) were adequately funded to provide for their elderly and infirm sisters in retirement; more than half (51%, or 198 institutes) had 20% or less of their needed retirement funds. The ability of religious institutes to respond to this financial challenge is limited by the age of the sisters – only 19% are under age 70 and 81% are age 70 older.<sup>ii</sup> The smaller proportion of sisters under age 70 diminishes the capacity of religious institutes to sustain leadership teams and to bring in salaries or stipends.

To learn from those institutes who had successfully navigated this transition and were adequately providing for the retirement needs of the institute, the Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI) commissioned CARA to conduct a study of U.S. women’s religious institutes that were successfully planning for and funding their members’ elderly care.<sup>iii</sup> The study, and this Special Report, were generously funded by the Catholic Sisters Initiative of the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, in order to make its findings accessible to religious institutes worldwide who may be facing this issue now and into the future.

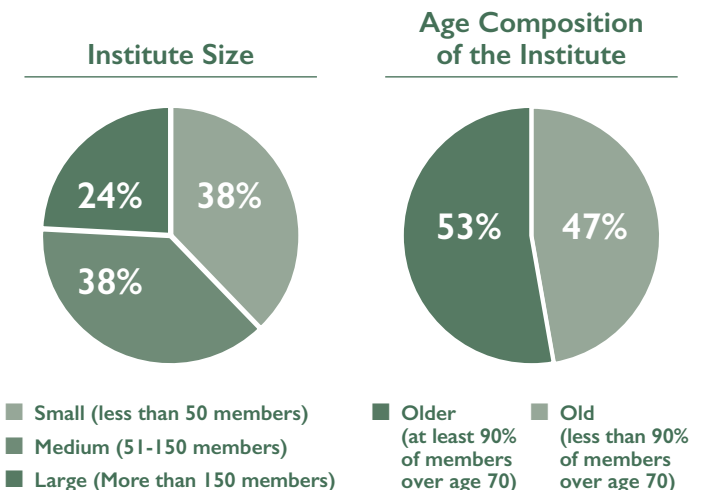
In fall 2022, CARA surveyed 24 women’s religious institutes<sup>iv</sup> and requested an interview from a member of the leadership team and/or treasurer, or the financial manager of the institute. Altogether, 19 surveys were completed and

21 interviews were conducted. This Special Report presents highlights of the key lessons learned from the leaders of the 21 participating religious institutes in three parts:

- *Part I: Planning and Implementation*
- *Part II: Finances*
- *Part III: Facilities*

### ■ PARTICIPATING INSTITUTES

Twenty-one women’s religious institutes participated in this study, with membership ranging from 12 to 2,077 professed members. Eight of the institutes (38%) are small (less than 50 members), eight (38%) are medium size (51-150 members), and five (24%) are large (more than



150 members). Just over one-half (53%) are older (at least 90% of their members are over age 70) and 47% are old institutes (less than 90% of members are over age 70). Among the 21 institutes, 18 are apostolic institutes and three are contemplative.

Key findings from the study are illustrated by representative quotes from the interviews. The table at the right presents a few of the institute characteristics for each of the 21 participating religious institutes. These characteristics are inserted after each quote throughout the report to describe the institute from which each quote came.



Descriptive Characteristics of Participating Religious Institutes				
	Type of Institute	Relative Size of Institute	Percentage of Members Over 70	Institute Age
1	Apostolic	Medium	97%	Older
2	Apostolic	Small	75%	Old
3	Contemplative	Small	83%	Old
4	Apostolic	Large	90%	Older
5	Apostolic	Small	73%	Old
6	Apostolic	Medium	95%	Older
7	Apostolic	Medium	—	—
8	Apostolic	Large	90%	Older
9	Apostolic	Medium	87%	Old
10	Apostolic	Small	85%	Old
11	Apostolic	Small	90%	Older
12	Apostolic	Large	94%	Older
13	Apostolic	Medium	87%	Old
14	Apostolic	Medium	91%	Older
15	Apostolic	Small	100%	Older
16	Apostolic	Large	93%	Older
17	Apostolic	Large	94%	Older
18	Apostolic	Medium	94%	Older
19	Contemplative	Small	62%	Old
20	Apostolic	Medium	—	—
21	Contemplative	Small	84%	Old

## PART I. PLANNING AND LEADERSHIP

Financial planning is for the long-term. Religious institutes that are adequately funded for their retirement needs began the process more than 20 years ago, on average about 40 years ago. Their leadership looked to the distant future and actively engaged the entire institute in the discussion at chapter meetings. Institutes with a stable leadership group, especially in finances, benefited by a consistency in their response and planning.

*Back in 1968, our General Chapter directed the president and council to begin retirement planning. The situation at that time was [that] we were seeing a significant decrease each year in the number of sisters. People were leaving the community and there was*

*concern that we wouldn't have funding to provide for our elderly sisters. So that was basically the motivation to make sure that there was money available. It took some time to put the plan into place. (Small Apostolic Older Institute)*

*The beginning of the awareness back in 2002 was just to make sure that the leadership team and the congregation were informed about the financial realities of the congregation. So that was the first kind of step—we started doing annual meetings to the full congregation that showed our financial picture. And every year, the sisters would absorb more and more of that. And out of that came the realization that if we continue*

*with the status quo, we would be in trouble within eight to ten years. So that's when we really started to work with the ministries to get them on their own, going on their own, and aware of their own need for sustainability so that the congregation could concentrate on the members in getting the finances in order.*  
(Medium Apostolic Institute)



*NRRO and RCRI [have played in giving] us so many useful tools through the years. I think we started talking about it back in the '70s, but I think probably [it was] in the '90s when we really actively started realizing, "Wow, we need to start thinking about what are we going to do when the majority of our sisters are no longer working."*  
(Medium Apostolic Older Institute)

These religious institutes relied on consultants and financial experts in their planning for retirement. Many cite the importance of using the TRENDS<sup>v</sup> program provided by the Resource Center for Religious Institutes<sup>vi</sup> (RCRI) and the evaluation tools offered by the National Religious Retirement Office<sup>vii</sup> (NRRO) for planning and education purposes. Institute advisory committees and boards of charitable trusts benefitted by recruiting members with explicit expertise in financial management, insurance, and retirement planning.

*We have what we call a Stewardship Committee. And on the Stewardship Committee is the general counsel, myself, chair, our general secretary, and that all that goes through the corporation, the 501(c)(3) corporation. And we have some lay people who have experience and background in finance and investments. And then, I think, the most important thing is, we have an investment consultant, and they are very fine, very fine.* (Medium Apostolic Old Institute)

*We partner with [financial services company] as our consultancy and they are very well versed in the needs of religious communities, retirement funds and how to invest those monies socially responsibly so that way we can make sure that our mission is being followed as well as knowing what the needs are of the sisters, how many sisters we have. They monitor what our budget is every year so that they know how much money we're going to need to be pulling out of investments. So, it's very important to have a consulting firm that understands religious.* (Small Apostolic Old Institute)

*Of course, we've always participated in the NRRO grant process. Whether we were over or underfunded, we wanted to participate. We've used TRENDS since it started. We've been very grateful for the role that*

Many institutes began their retirement planning with small steps, often by assessing a certain amount of the stipends or salaries of sisters for their retirement fund and by designating a portion of property sales for retirement. These steps were accompanied by a renewed commitment to their mission, often by designating some portion of available resources to supporting and sustaining the ministries they had founded and served in.

*We had a policy, part of the retirement policy and part of the financial policies, that a certain percentage of every sister's salary was immediately deposited into the support trust. So, 3% of the income that we received for any sister was automatically deposited in the retirement trust as her pension. From the beginning of the establishment of that trust, we made an annual contribution over and above that to help build that fund. We're no longer doing that now. The only thing that goes into that is the Social Security and pension benefits from sisters.* (Small Apostolic Old Institute)

*I became treasurer the first time in '85. And I remember going with other religious treasurers from [the local region] to meet with the bishop or his representatives, to just talk about stipends and salaries, about both increasing them and establishing some medical benefits, because prior to that medical insurance was not part of the stipends.* (Small Apostolic Old Institute)

*Sister X in the '70s was very instrumental in developing lay equivalent salaries for religious at the time for retirement planning. I believe she actually developed the first 12-year cash flow planning model along with the accounting firm that served the sisters at the time.* (Medium Apostolic Older Institute)

*That led to the decision in the U.S. to really look at our campuses where we care for our elders, and look at other uses for mission there. So, it's not just where people go to finish their lives, but it's where they go to continue to be enlivened by mission going forward. It also helped us to really look at the number of people that were living alone, or in like twos or threes, and the properties that we owned, and how much longer could they be there. So, we've been more proactive since then in the maintenance of our properties so that when we sell them, we get a good amount of money for them. And as we sell our properties, because we actually are, we have this retirement trust that has enough funds there. We actually are dedicating the funds from the sale of properties to mission.*  
(Medium Apostolic Older Institute)



*Right now, we're participating in this SOAR!<sup>viii</sup> Pathways to Wellness Program, you know, and one of the things we've been talking about is that our ministry never ends. We have sisters that have moved to the mother house who are 90 but still in pretty good health and who are having trouble feeling like there's any meaning in their lives.*  
(Medium Apostolic Old Institute)

Throughout the years of planning and developing their institute's resources, leadership provided clear and regular communication with the institute's membership, thereby sustaining a sense and reality of shared ownership and responsibility for the decisions being made. This was complemented by a positive attitude and a context for aging that fostered a culture in which each sister continued to contribute to the mission of the institute through her witness and prayer.

*So, at their annual meeting there's always either a verbal or written report on the financial position and they highlight key parts of that. So, everybody in the congregation knows the position and the choices that they make and how it impacts the congregation's resources and abilities for the sisters and missions.*  
(Medium Apostolic Older Institute)

*So, it's important for them to understand and to know that they're going to be taken care of, first of all because you do have a few wondering if they are going to be able to take care of me into the future. Nobody's working anymore, how are we going to get money, you know, donations are down, so the sisters have been very transparent with sharing that information and the impact that the government programs have made.*  
(Small Apostolic Old Institute)

*Well, the decision—yes. I mean, the first initial decision, absolutely, knowing that we would have to have monies. That was the primary decision. The second decision, by that time, it wasn't so much about money. It was about our lives as a monastery, where can we have impact, where can we serve? It was never just about we've got to get this retirement fund built. It was always about living the life as women [religious] today and how best can we serve.* (Small Contemplative Old Institute)

*The other thing, I think, that helps is we consider our ministry as our presence to people and to one another and so the ministry never ends. And for instance, if you move from some place where you're working in a parish and you come back to the mother house, that doesn't mean that your ministry has ended. Your ministry continues with the neighbor here in town, with one another, with whoever your life touches. I think that's been somewhat helpful.* (Medium Apostolic Old Institute)

*We mostly equated ministry and mission as synonyms. When we didn't have the ministries, and we weren't in schools, and we weren't running schools, and we weren't teaching in the schools, there was a loss of purpose. The consultants helped us with that. And they said, "well, what's your mission?" And we said, "well, our mission is being the compassionate presence of God in our world." And what we realized is we could do that anyway. So, God is in this...*  
(Medium Apostolic Institute)

## PART II. FINANCES

The average annual cost of care in 2022 for each elderly/infirm member among the participating religious institutes was \$57,261. Half of the participating institutes paid \$55,246 for care for each of their elderly/infirm members per year. The lowest average annual cost of care was \$21,400 and the highest was \$93,000.

Asked what financial practices the religious institutes have employed, all participating religious institutes report utilizing outside investment advisors and participating in the Social Security program.

*Key for our own congregation has been the fact that we started participating in Social Security, and that we do make use of enrolling in Medicare and Medicaid.... I think the fact that we made use of enrolling in those programs 40 and 50 years ago helped us greatly and the fact that we licensed our Care Center so that we could accept Medicare and Medicaid. I would encourage other orders, if they aren't doing all of those items, to be looking at government programs like that and, if they can, enroll in them. (Medium Apostolic Older Institute)*

*So, it probably goes back to the late '60s where the first treasurer of our community got the sisters on Social Security that were eligible. We put people on Medicaid when they're eligible for Medicaid. And there's different programs here in our state that we can tap into. There's a utility tax credit that's given each year to folks that are low income, so we tap into that. Each year at open enrollment we look at the prescription coverage that we have for our sisters to make sure that they're in the right plan and we switch people as needed. We're just kind of continually just working to see what's out there that can help us. (Small Contemplative Old Institute)*

*We do have the Medicare, Social Security is a very small part of it but it's very important to be part of Medicare because of the health insurance premiums, and also coverage for medical bills. Then, as sisters become eligible, we have also moved into participating in Medicaid and that becomes extremely important*

*when a sister needs to go into a healthcare facility because we aren't able to care for her ourselves. Otherwise, the monthly amount that we would have to pay to the facility would be astronomical. So, that has really helped us to be able to be a part of those programs. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

The creation of a charitable trust dedicated to the retirement and healthcare needs of the sisters was a helpful legal and financial asset for an institute. In doing so, it is important to seek the assistance and advice of financial and

Which of the following has your religious institute practiced? <sup>ix</sup> 19 responding religious institutes)	
	%
Utilize outside investment advisors	100
Participate in Social Security	100
Completed 12-year cash flow or similar projection	84
Divested of underutilized property	84
Established a continuing community support fund	79
Participate in Medicaid	79
Negotiated salaries/stipends for employed members	68
Pursue fundraising efforts others	68
Participate in Supplemental Security Income	68
Developed alternate uses for underutilized property	68
Participate in <i>Qualified Medicare Beneficiary</i>	68
Utilize Medicaid in other licensed facility	63
Pursue funds from National Religious Retirement Office	53
Pursue funds from Support Our Aging Religious	42
Utilize Medicaid in on-site licensed facility	32
Participate in collaborative projects for elderly care	26

A key decision for these religious institutes was the choice to participate in public programs for retirement and healthcare, and the earlier the better. Participation in Social Security was helpful and Medicare and Medicaid even more so. Paying careful attention to other public programs for the elderly, especially state programs such as Qualified Medicare Beneficiary or prescription drug programs, also proved to be beneficial in managing the increasing costs of healthcare.

legal advisors who are familiar with religious life. Institutes cited the value of utilizing the TRENDS program in helping with their financial planning, in part because it was created by and for religious. Numerous charitable trusts were initiated with the proceeds from the sale of property or other assets of the institute. The charitable trusts were often supplemented by regular contributions assessed on the stipends and salaries of institute members and benefactions received by the institute.



*finance, financial planning, that we have done very well with our financial investments. We do pay out of pocket for our sisters to be in a health-care facility. We no longer own our healthcare facility; we have given that to someone else and we are transplanting ownership and the operations to another entity. We pay out of pocket for healthcare and*

*it is now our trust that is able to pay for the care. We will be able to care for every sister until the end. (Small Apostolic Older Institute)*

*TRENDS is a huge forecasting tool that's been very important because it helps us look at where are we today, what are the ages of our sisters, what are their care needs in the future, what our levels of care [are currently] for our sisters, and how much funding do we have available. So, that's been very helpful. [Also], having the outside investment managers that we hire to manage those funds is hugely important because they can watch the market, they understand what's going on. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

*When we received the money from letting go of the sponsored institution, we set up a charitable trust for retirement and we funded that. I used the past service liability\* calculation, then I increased it by 20%. I call that my uncertainty factor, because who knows what's really going to happen. We took 120% of what we needed for the past service liability and we put that in the charitable trust. We've got seven trustees on there: four of them are sisters and three of them are lay people. They're not paid, they're trustees of the charitable trust. We see in the future, there will be less sisters and more lay people on that. We have a trust document that is ironclad as we can possibly get at this point. We use the charitable trust money to fund retirement now on an annual basis. (Medium Apostolic Old Institute)*

*Let's look at all of the resources that are available for the sisters, [and then] set aside 110% of what the cash flow modelling retirement planning says they need to care for the members. Set aside another two full years of operating expenses for the congregation and properties and what's left let's put into what they call a mission reserve fund. So, there are three designated funds now, and the way the sisters support ministries with financial support is they can give away 5% of a 3-year average balance in that reserve fund. And the resource proposal also talks about every four years that you have to rebalance your resources and re-designate to make sure that you're setting aside enough for retirement. (Medium Apostolic Older Institute)*

*Well the sisters here engaged in a planning process around 1990. They had 560 acres of property at which they had a very large monastery and cemetery. The decision was made to build a new, smaller, monastery for 30 people and to sell 400 acres of property. Some of [the property] went to the diocese and the school. The former monastery became a school and a retreat center. Then they sold 200 acres across the*

*Then, in the '80s, we started a community support trust; that was a designated fund for retirement for our elderly or infirm sisters. We have continued to invest in that. It's [through] the grace of God, as well as the gifts of the people that we've had involved in our*



*street to a group who created a retirement village. So, the sisters' legacy of education and healthcare continued on the campus. The sisters built a smaller monastery. The sale of the land then became the nucleus of the retirement fund. That, having been invested, has grown so that the community is fully funded. (Small Contemplative Old Institute)*

Having an active development office for the institute has served both to provide dedicated funds for retirement care and to sustain the institute’s mission. A few institutes have re-focused their development office entirely to the institute’s mission as their retirement and healthcare needs are fully covered by their charitable trust. Several institutes report that they no longer actively raise funds for their retirement needs but they still receive donations specifically intended for their retired sisters.

*Now, when we started the development program we had an advisory board composed of lay people who knew the sisters either as friends or family members, and our focus with the advisory board was on retirement needs and so on. (Medium Apostolic Old Institute)*

*I think, for the most part, the leadership team that was in office in the early ‘80s recognized that financially we didn’t have the resources to continue to maintain our mission, let alone care for our elderly. That was the impetus for starting a long-range planning process and including the retirement question within that. It was also at that same time that we began to develop a development program, a financial development program for the province. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

*Yes, we have a development office of five people. There’s not necessarily a goal for [retirement needs]. But we do raise money for the retirement needs. We do fundraising for different things at different times. And also, some of our donors might choose to give to the retirement fund, rather than anything else. So, there’s probably some donors who faithfully give to the retirement fund. There are other donors who give to another*

*[cause], to our ministry funds. But we do certainly request funds at a certain time of the year for retirement funds. And the development office focuses on that. (Large Apostolic Older Institute)*

*I think especially if an institute does not have a development program that we would recommend that, because people really want to give back to the sisters and they are very generous. We do an appeal letter every fall, specifically for retirement, and that is our biggest fundraiser of the year because people want to give to retirement. (Medium Apostolic Old Institute)*

*We do have an advancement office. Mainly it’s just appeals to any number of people that had our sisters in school over the years, or they’re friends of the convent, or our own relatives... But the focus really for the last several years in all of our fundraising has been not fundraising for the sisters and their retirement needs, because we recognize we’re funded. We’re fully funded. The focus has been fundraising for our sponsored ministries. And God bless our donors, because there are still donors who every day mail in a check saying, no, no, no, I want this to go to care for Sister X when she retires. And we get it. I’m not going to turn it away. But we really are trying to put the spotlight on our sponsored ministries because that is the legacy of the sisters and we are trying to help them. I think that that’s been one of the most beneficial side effects of being fully funded is that not only are we taking care of our sisters first and foremost, but the side effect is any fundraising effort we do make only benefits our sponsored ministries. (Medium Apostolic Older Institute)*

## PART III. FACILITIES

Most participating religious institutes (16 out of 19 institutes) have their own “assisted living” facility for elderly, sick and disabled sisters. In addition, half send their sisters to a retirement home that they partner with outside the religious institute. Also, half of the report their elderly sisters live with their sisters in ministry.

The decisions about what types of facilities and scope of health-care to provide for their sisters was often unique to each institute, their context, and their culture. Leadership considered

what was the best fit for their members – to operate their own retirement healthcare facility (licensed or not licensed), to open the facility to lay persons, to send their sisters to facilities with other sisters, to Catholic sponsored

How is your religious institute taking care of the needs of elderly, sick, and those living with disability requiring special care?	
	%
We have our own assisted living home for the elderly, sick and disabled	84
We take our sisters to a retirement home we partner with outside the religious institute	47
Our elderly sisters live with the sisters in ministry	47

facilities, or to other private and public facilities. Foremost in their consideration was the quality of care provided, a facility suitable for a woman religious, and a place where the sisters could continue to accompany one another.



*the early 2000s we said, “we have to do something now while we’re still young enough and have the energy to make the decision.” I think another thing I need to say is that, as we were building, we said, “okay, in 20 - 30 years we might have no sisters to fill it.” So, we built it with whatever was required for an assisted living facility, so that when it’s too much for us someone else can come and take it over as assisted living*

*facility. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

*At the same time, in 1990, we converted our provincial house into an assisted living facility that welcomes lay persons. So, in the planning for that, we worked with professionals to set up their programming. Our own sisters are eligible to live in that facility if they need assisted living.... We established a fund to assist lay persons in the area who didn’t have sufficient resources to continue to stay at the facility. It was only later that we became eligible for Medicaid funding, which was helpful. But we did, like I said, we set up a trust which assists, and we do fundraising for that trust for lay persons living in that facility. We sold that facility in 2019 to a non-Catholic non-profit. In the arrangements with them we also sold our sisters’ residence and our offices. We’re leasing them back from that organization. We retained control as trustee of the fund that we had established to support it. All the way through, because we had sisters working in that ministry, working with healthcare, elder care, getting education, they were also able to assist our own members in understanding the needs of retirement, at least for those in assisted living. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

*I think one of the other things that was very good in their planning is that at the time they were taking care of their elderly sisters in what they called an infirmary, and alongside of that they started a nursing home, I’ll call it, they got licensed and they were providing care for others from the community. They ended up, in the mid ‘90s they donated that operation, the beds, the licenses, to the local hospital in exchange for priority access for the sisters to come into that nursing home as needed at whatever government benefits were available to them at the time. And so, they took an operation that was very expensive and getting more expensive, more complicated, and gave it to the local hospital in exchange for nursing care for their elderly sisters at government benefit level. (Medium Apostolic Older Institute)*

*So, with a lot of involvement with the sisters we decided that we would build new, because no matter what we did with the old building, the footprint just didn’t work.... We designed and built a new mother house that includes an administrative wing. Each bedroom is the same and every room is spacious, and each has own bathroom, total bathroom, shower, sink, toilet. And I’m very happy with the facility. We built it to be sustainable; we built it [to be] low maintenance because we’re all getting older and we can’t be putting a lot of maintenance into the building. Plus, we needed it to be accessible, that was a big thing. So, this building is on ground level so anybody can get in and out of there. It was a big step, but at that point in*

*We do have our own skilled nursing facility that’s on our property. It is in the final stages of being sold. I’m sure as you’ve heard it, stand-alone skilled nursing facilities are getting harder and harder to maintain. That decision, after studies were done, was made years ago. It will remain on our grounds as a skilled nursing facility where we are able to have our sisters in there. So, it’s a very nice relationship, very much in a way of still maintaining the mission integrity, our chapel gets to remain there for the sisters. It will still be on the grounds and still be accessible to us. That’s something that was always natural, that our sisters could be on our grounds.... (Large Apostolic Older Institute)*



*Interestingly, although most religious institutes have formal policies on retirement and healthcare, in practice those policies are actualized*



in private, informal conversations between the individual and leadership. These policies become important in the discussions within the institute about aging and retirement, in discerning what the options are.

*There is no policy, and so what we do is you discern with the prioress. Most people try to make it to 70 before they give up the ghost. I would say we have people in their 80s that are still working in active ministry because they want to work. When their health gets to the point that physically they can't do it anymore, then they start having a conversation with the prioress. But there is an expectation that, if you can work, you work. (Small Contemplative Old Institute)*

*The second step was that in 1985 at a provincial chapter, we adopted a retirement policy. That had been in the works, in development probably since '81, '82, somewhere in that time frame. It was the subsequent leadership team that initiated a long-range planning process. This was one of the objectives. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

*We formulated a policy back in 1991 and presented it at chapter. But I was looking back at it today and thinking we really don't use it; we don't consult the policy, I should say, and yet we are operating according to it, if that makes sense. So, although we have this policy, it's not at the forefront. And yet we are operating in keeping with the spirit of the policy. And again, basically it's the leadership team who has to discern when it's time to talk to a sister, who does that [i.e., speaks to the sister], and it is sometimes very difficult, because not everybody wants to admit that they need more assistance. So sometimes you will have these lovely women who go so gently. But other times it's really difficult because, especially if they have dementia, they don't see their own need. So, it's leadership who talks to them, who stays with them. (Small Apostolic Older Institute)*

*We did develop some retirement policies that were vague, they were not like, this is exactly what's going to*



*happen. I think we all know that what's going to happen is, we will get to a point where we need some extra assistance. We've been kind of just living into this, rather than getting the policies set. (Medium Apostolic Older Institute)*

*Well, I think the retirement policy was reached by the planning of the chapter. Then, as time moved along, either through assemblies where we just had discussions or from*

*informal provincial chapters, we made adjustments. Every sister completes a number of pieces of information. One is they plan their own funeral. They have a document that says, if I need to be cared for outside of the convent, here are my preferences. They can opt for the assisted living facility here on our campus. They can opt for the local nursing home, which is a county nursing home. They can choose a Catholic nursing home in a neighboring city. So, they have some control over the direction that things take. But I have to say that in the more recent years it's very much a conversation between the superior and the sister about what's happening and what the needs are, and what's available. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

*What happened is, we had the opportunity of moving those 22 sisters in skilled nursing to the same nursing home, a Catholic nursing home that has daily Mass. It's sponsored by the diocese that we're in. So, even though the provincial house was not sold at that time, we made the decision and consulted with the sisters and everything, to move the sisters at that time, so that we could have them in the same facility, a Catholic facility. So that's when the 22 sisters in skilled nursing were moved, which is 40 minutes away from here. (Small Apostolic Old Institute)*

*We do know that we have enough funds to care for us going forward. We would probably be more integrated with other religious communities, or some of us might go together to the same nursing home. It's hard to plan for that because we do have some newer members entering, though not a lot. (Medium Apostolic Older Institute)*

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## CONCLUSION

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There is much wisdom in these insights from 21 leaders of U.S. women's religious institutes that can be passed on for the benefit of others. These institutes have learned that it pays to begin thinking about retirement early – many of them have been preparing for this for more than 40 years. This planning needs to engage the entire leadership team, but they also need to draw in experts from outside the institute and communicate regularly and transparently with all members, so that everyone feels that they are a part of the process. Good retirement policies are also important, and it helps if the institute can establish a charitable trust and transfer assets from the sale of institute properties into that trust. Perhaps the most important lesson, though,



is the need to enlist all members of the institute into this planning, to help them to see that this, too, is all part of God's plan for them. As one institute leader said, so eloquently:

*We mostly equated ministry and mission as synonyms. When we didn't have the ministries, and we weren't in schools, and we weren't running schools, and we weren't teaching in the schools, there was a loss of purpose. The consultants helped us with that. And they said, "well, what's your mission?" And we said, "well, our mission is being the compassionate presence of God in our world." And what we realized is we could do that anyway. So, God is in this...*  
(Medium Apostolic Institute)

### ■ ENDNOTES

<sup>i</sup> *The Official Catholic Directory*, 2002 and 2022.

<sup>ii</sup> National Religious Retirement Office, Statistical Report, August 2022.

<sup>iii</sup> This study builds from a previous study conducted by CARA in 2002 for the USCCB National Religious Retirement Office. See Bendyna, Mary E. 2003. *Planning for Retirement and Mission: A Best Practices Study*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate.

<sup>iv</sup> CARA convened an advisory committee of men and women religious who either serve in leadership teams of religious institutes or serve in organizations that support religious institutes. This committee recommended 24 religious institutes that fit the criteria for participation in the study and provided contact information for these institutes to CARA.

<sup>v</sup> TRENDS is a software tool offered by RCRI. It was created by NATRI to assist treasurers of religious institutes in projecting fund cash flows and census demographics over time, with the intention of yielding information that can be proactive and helpful in light of decision-making activity.

<sup>vi</sup> Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI) provides professional advice and resources for the leadership of religious institutes who become members of RCRI. Its staff help navigate the many complexities related to taxes and tax-exemption, corporate structure, internal organizational setup, finance, administration, and canon law.

<sup>vii</sup> National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) manages the Retirement Fund for Religious and provides financial grants and consulting services to religious institutes.

<sup>viii</sup> Support Our Aging Religious! (SOAR!) raises funds and provides grants to help Catholic religious congregations in the United States care for their elderly and infirm members.

<sup>ix</sup> The interview protocol used the original description of practices employed in the 2003 CARA study, several of which have since evolved somewhat. The more current description of these practices is provided in this table.

<sup>x</sup> Unfunded past service liability is the difference between the estimated elder care costs in retirement and the assets that have been set aside to pay for them.

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## ■ RESOURCES

### **Assn. des Tresorieres et Tresoriers des instituts religieux (ATTIR)**

6450 avenue Christophe-Colomb  
Bureau 401  
Montreal, QC H2R 2W3  
[www.attir.ca](http://www.attir.ca)

### **Assn. of Treasurers of Rel. Institutes (ATRI) Canada**

1 - 2025 Main Street West  
North Bay, ON P1B 2X6  
[www.atri.on.ca](http://www.atri.on.ca)

### **Canon Law Society of America (CLSA)**

415 Michigan Avenue, NE  
Suite 101  
Washington, DC 20017  
[www.clsa.org](http://www.clsa.org)

### **Catholic Legal Immigration Network (CLINIC)**

8757 Georgia Avenue  
Suite 850  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
<https://cliniclegal.org>

### **Conference for Catholic Facility Management (CCFM)**

20 Archbishop May Dr.  
St. Louis, MO 63119  
<https://ccfm.net>

### **Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR)**

415 Michigan Avenue, NE, Suite 420  
Washington, DC 20017  
[www.cmswr.org](http://www.cmswr.org)

### **Diocesan Fiscal Management Conf. (DFMC)**

4727 E. Bell Road  
Suite 45-358  
Phoenix, AZ 85032  
[www.dfmcconf.org](http://www.dfmcconf.org)

### **Leadership Conf. of Women Religious (LCWR)**

8737 Colesville Road  
Suite 610  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
[www.lcwr.org/](http://www.lcwr.org/)

### **National Association of Church Personnel Admin. (NACPA)**

2050 Ballenger Avenue  
Suite 200  
Alexandria, VA 22314  
[www.nacpa.org](http://www.nacpa.org)

### **National Conf. of Vicars for Religious (NCVR)**

1933 Spielbusch Avenue  
Toledo, OH 43604  
[www.ncvreligious.org](http://www.ncvreligious.org)

### **National Religious Retirement Office**

3211 4th St, NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
[www.usccb.org/offices/  
national-religious-retirement-office](http://www.usccb.org/offices/national-religious-retirement-office)

### **Resource Center for Religious Institutes**

8737 Colesville Road  
Suite 610  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
<https://www.trcri.org/>

### **SOAR! Support Our Aging Religious**

8484 Georgia Avenue  
Suite 300  
Silver Spring, MD 20910  
<https://soar-usa.org/>

### **Wisconsin Religious Collaborative**

c/o S. Julie Tydrich  
912 Market St  
La Crosse, WI 54601  
<https://www.wrcollab.org/>



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