

Fund to benefit 'retired' religious gives back to those who have given

By Maria Wiering

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"I can't even spell the word 'retired,' " quipped Brother Malcolm O'Sullivan, a Brother of Christian Schools.

At age 90, he spends his days at Calvert Hall College High School in Towson, working with a scholars program and tutoring students.

His attitude of persevering service is widely shared among senior members of religious orders, many of whom continue to work in schools, parishes and their communities long past retirement age.

Gratitude for religious men and women's contributions is one reason people give to the annual appeal for the Retirement Fund for Religious, a national collection that supports elderly sisters, brothers and religious order priests. This year's collection will be taken in most parishes Dec. 13-14.

A religious sister, brother and order priest shared their service and views on retirement with the Catholic Review. Two of their communities - the School Sisters of Notre Dame and the Josephites - were assisted by the Retirement Fund last year.

"Our need will enable other people to do God's work," said School Sister of Notre Dame Sister Virginia Brien, whose community received more than \$283,500 from the fund last year.

Brother Malcolm O'Sullivan, F.C.S.

No matter his assignment, Brother Malcolm O'Sullivan is usually the oldest person there, he said, and his current role in Calvert Hall College High School is no exception. Since 2011, the Irish-born De La Salle Christian Brother has been working with the school's McMullen Scholars Program.

"I still feel like I have some pizzazz," he said.

Brother Malcolm moved to the states as a 4-year-old, and grew up in New York City. He attended Christian Brothers schools from fifth through ninth grades, and then joined the order's juniorate, a high school for boys who want to join the community. He admits that sports played a big role in his initial interest in the brothers. After graduation, he continued studies in Washington, D.C., before being called back to New York to fill gaps left by religious brothers serving in World War II.

Brother Malcolm taught, coached and was principal in seven of the order's schools

in New York City and State. At 36, he was named president of a high school in Memphis, Tenn. Three years later, he moved back to New York to work in fundraising at Manhattan College, and then he became dean of the business school. He founded an annual gala that continues to draw millions for the school today. Along the way, Brother Malcolm earned two master's degrees, a doctorate in education, and an MBA. He taught at Manhattan College's business school for more than a decade; co-founded a university in Chihuahua, Mexico; and was principal of a Catholic school in New Jersey.

Sister Virginia Brien, S.S.N.D.

Sister Virginia recalls wanting to be a sister around age 8, long before she understood what a sister was. She was taught by School Sisters of Notre Dame in her hometown of Rochester, N.Y., and joined their aspirancy program at age 15.

"From then on, my life has been one of peace and gratitude," she said, "especially gratitude."

Sister Virginia, 89, spent her early years teaching in Pennsylvania with a brief stint at St. James and John School in Baltimore. In 1978, she left for the African missions. She spent 20 years in Nigeria, where she first taught in a school, and then served as the assistant to the bishop of Ikot Ekpene.

She remembers arriving in Africa to find she had no place to stay, and when one was found, there was no running water or electricity. She loved her work, but endured several harrowing situations, including being robbed by gun point three times.

Sister Virginia returned to the U.S. in 2001. She worked as a sacristan in her order's motherhouse on North Charles Street in Baltimore until retiring in 2013. She continues to sew and participate in the motherhouse's community, which includes about 100 sisters, with 50 more in its health care facility.

Father Francis Hull, S.S.J.

Philadelphia native Father Francis Hull, 90, says he grew up in "the days of Catholic Camelot," when parishes and schools were full. After graduating from high school, he served in the U.S. Army Air Corps, worked for an insurance company, and then enrolled in St. Joseph's College in Philadelphia. It was there he first heard of the Josephites, whose mission is to serve the African-American community. He entered the community in 1948 and was ordained in 1957.

Father Hull taught in New Orleans at a Josephite high school, that, by the 1970s, had a reputation for shaping Louisiana's black political leaders. He also taught at Josephite seminaries, edited his order's magazine, served as a rector of a high school, and ministered in parishes in Virginia, Louisiana, Texas and Washington,

D.C., working to advance the place of African-Americans in the church and society. Father Hull retired in 2012 from parish work but continues to work as his order's archivist at its Baltimore motherhouse. Most Josephites do not retire, he added. "As long as we're in good health, why retire?" he asked.

Caring for men and women religious

More than 35,000 senior Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests are helped each year through the national collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious, including many who are living in the Archdiocese of Baltimore. Last year's appeal raised more than \$28.4 million, which the National Religious Retirement Office distributed to 424 religious communities..

The 2013 appeal raised \$394,816 in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and distributed \$657,436 to 13 communities in Maryland.

Sister Maria Luz Ortiz, a Mission Helper of the Sacred Heart who coordinates the local appeal, said Catholics in the Archdiocese of Baltimore have been generous to the appeal, and the appeal has been generous to local retired priests, brothers and sisters.

"I have a great deal of gratitude to the people in the archdiocese," she said.

According to a Nov. 19 statement from the National Religious Retirement Office , the U.S. bishops initiated the collection in 1998 to address U.S. religious communities' lack of retirement funding. They continue to sponsor the appeal, along with national organizations of Catholic religious men and women.

According to the statement, the annual appeal helps to alleviate a "financial crisis" rooted in low salaries and changing demographics.

"Traditionally, Catholic sisters, brothers and religious order priests ... worked for small stipends that furnished only the basics of daily living," it said. "As a result, many communities lack adequate retirement savings. At the same time, elderly religious are living longer and now outnumber younger, wage-earning religious."

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