

# Retirement Fund for Religious Dec. 9

When the collection plate is passed Dec. 9, parishioners in churches throughout the Archdiocese of Baltimore will be asked to give generously for the 20th annual appeal for the Retirement Fund for Religious.

“The unfunded retirement liability is difficult and painful to comprehend,” said Sister Janice Bader, a Sister of the Most Precious Blood of O’Fallon, Missouri, director of the National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO) of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, D.C.

The appeal has helped ensure this liability can become a “manageable concern,” rather than a “crisis,” Sister Janice said.

Since the first national annual appeal took place in Catholic parishes in 1988, NRRO has raised more than \$529 million.

In 2006 the NRRO distributed \$23 million in basic grants that benefited 515 of the nation’s Catholic religious institutes of women and men, Sister Janice said.

The Archdiocese of Baltimore contributed \$531,434, a more than 6 percent increase over 2005 donations, said Rachel Scherer, a spokeswoman for the School Sisters of Notre Dame for the Atlantic-Midwest Province based in Baltimore, which covers 34 different dioceses nationwide.

The following are among those religious institutes in the Archdiocese of Baltimore that received grants made possible by this appeal, according to the 2006 annual report for the Retirement Fund for Religious: Carmelite Sisters of Baltimore, Little Sisters of Jesus, Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart, Oblate Sisters of Providence, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Regional Community, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Order of Friars Minor Conventual, Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent and the Benedictine Sisters of Baltimore.

Of the 154 School Sisters of Notre Dame in the Archdiocese of Baltimore, 78 are

retired, she said.

“Any effort to help our retired sisters is appreciated,” she said. “A lot of the sisters who are no longer in the workforce, don’t consider themselves to be retired, because most of them are living on mission,” meaning they provide pastoral care in parishes, make baked goods for charitable causes and are involved in a host of other ministries.

Donations have enabled NRRO to seed and stabilize retirement funds at religious institutes, leverage local fundraising, and assist capital campaigns, Sister Janice said.

“Grant awards have assisted investment and supported collaboration among religious institutes and helped ensure quality of life and adequate health care for thousands of women and men in religious vocations formerly at risk,” said Ginny Cunningham, project manager for the Retirement Fund for the Religious, based in Pittsburgh.

However, the gap between assets available for retirement and the cost of living/health care for elderly women and men religious has widened from \$2 billion to \$9 billion in the past 20 years and is expected to grow, Ms. Cunningham said.

In 2023, the combined Social Security benefits of all retired religious is projected to be \$184 million a year, but cost of care will total more than \$1.6 billion annually, she said.

More than 37,000 Catholic religious are now past age 70.

“More than 5,000 women and men require skilled nursing care,” Ms. Cunningham said. “While costs for care in a skilled nursing facility in the U.S. average more than \$65,000 annually, religious institutes have kept their average cost of skilled nursing care to \$49,850.”