



Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

December 1, 2011

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

As our diocese continues to learn about the meaning of stewardship, one theme is clear: we give of ourselves and of our treasures in gratefulness to God for all the blessings we have received. In 2010, while visiting a senior-care facility, our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI noted, "Indeed, the provision of care for the elderly should be considered not so much an act of generosity as the repayment of a debt of gratitude." We have been blessed by God through the ministries of religious women and men in our diocese and throughout the world.

On the weekend of **December 10 and 11**, our parishes will take up the annual collection for the **Retirement Fund for Religious**, an opportunity to honor and thank thousands of our senior Catholic sisters, brothers, and religious order priests for their faithful service.

Whether or not we realize it, we are all beneficiaries of the tremendous contributions these women and men have made to the Church in the United States. Through hard work, prayer, and sacrifice, they built Catholic schools and hospitals, initiated programs to promote social justice, and ministered to the neediest among us. As I reflect on the dedication of elder religious, I am grateful for the ways they have shaped my own faith and for the tremendous service they have offered our diocese. I hope you, too, recall a sister, brother or priest who made a positive difference in your life.

Today, many religious communities struggle to care for their elderly members. Sky-rocketing health-care costs and decreased income make it increasingly difficult to provide necessary medications, nursing care, and basic services. Consider this: by the end of this decade, retired religious will outnumber wage-earning religious by nearly four to one! This annual collection, in conjunction with the services of the National Religious Retirement Office, is helping these communities plan so that they can care for these elderly and frail members living the consecrated life who served us throughout their lives as religious.

I recognize this is but one of numerous worthy causes seeking your support and I ask you to consider prayerfully what you can do to help. In thanksgiving for all that senior religious have done, let us "share in their care" by donating to the Retirement Fund for Religious and in praying for God's continued blessing on our elderly sisters, brothers, and religious order priests.

With prayerful best wishes, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester

Please read or print this letter in the parish bulletin on the weekend of Dec. 3-4 and take the collection for the Retirement Fund for Religious at all Masses on the weekend of Dec. 10-11.