

US Catholic Sisters

Overview of Domestic Human Development Interventions



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Catholic Sisters Initiative

INTRODUCTION

Unique Role of Sisters

The Conrad N. Hilton Foundation's Catholic Sisters Initiative launched its first five-year strategy in 2013. As the measurement, evaluation and learning (MEL) partner of the Sisters Initiative, the Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) at the University of Southern California has been documenting and analyzing the Sisters Initiative's grant-making strategy since 2014.

At the request of the Sisters Initiative, CRCC conducts research that informs the work of the Sisters Initiative. In order to understand the role of Catholic sisters domestically in human development, this report responds directly to the Sisters Initiative's request for information on areas of sister-driven human development work in the United States. This report will inform the implementation of the second strategy.

The contributions of Catholic Sisters in North America toward human development are especially well recognized in the areas of education and health care. In fact, the US House of Representatives has even acknowledged sisters' role in establishing hospitals, clinics and schools in the US through a resolution that was introduced in June 2012 during the 112th Congress, "H.Res. 689 — 112th Congress: Honoring Catholic sisters for their contributions to the United States."¹

Expanding beyond the schools and health care ministries that they are well known for, North American sisters have founded and organized a wide range of ministries serving the needs of their parishes and local communities, especially the most vulnerable and marginalized. In this report, CRCC looks at Catholic sisters who are doing human development work across the US and Canada, especially in areas where there might be resonance with the Sisters Initiative's human development strategy in other parts of the world. The Hilton Foundation has taken a leadership role within the philanthropic world to support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs), and the Sisters Initiative is similarly committed to raising the profile of sisters as approachable partners-of-choice in achieving the UN SDGs. We thus also examine areas where sisters are part of a larger policy effort to address urgent, specific needs.

What follows is an overview of some of the major areas that sisters have been involved in, including human trafficking, immigration and environment, as well as impact investment and Native American ministry. These are specific areas that the Sisters Initiative is interested in focusing on in the next iteration of its strategy. Rather than provide a comprehensive survey of sisters' domestic engagement in human development, this report focuses on the existing strengths and challenges that sisters face when working in these five areas. In exploring these issue areas, the report also indicates how each of these areas align with the UN SDGs. Our summary of each issue area concludes with a brief discussion of salient points and their significance for the Sisters Initiative's future funding strategy.

CRCC generally found that sisters often take a three-pronged approach when they confront human development challenges in the US: through advocacy for policy and systems change; awareness-building within the community, the Catholic Church and the public; and through direct service provision to those to whom they minister. In exploring the main issue areas of human trafficking, immigration and environment, we use advocacy, awareness and direct services as a helpful heuristic to understand sisters' unique role in human development, both in the US and elsewhere.

Methodology

The data for this report are drawn from both primary and secondary sources collected by CRCC. Many of the stories and case studies were derived from online secondary research; in this instance, the Global Sisters Report was a major repository for stories about the various ministries and engagements of sisters in the US. Another significant portion of the research entailed searching the Internet using key search terms and examining news stories, the websites of individual congregations and various coalition groups, and blogs devoted to development issues.

Primary research in the form of interviews and participant observation also yielded data for this report. We conducted phone and in-person interviews with Catholic sisters involved in impact investment and immigration, as well as with lay associates working with sisters in their ministries. CRCC also attended the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering (CSMG) in Washington, DC in early February 2018. CSMG is organized by the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and the annual meeting brings together hundreds of lay and ordained Catholics from parishes across the country whose faith inspires them to respond to pressing current domestic and global challenges. At the gathering, CRCC conducted short, unstructured interviews with organizers of Catholic nonprofits such as NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice and the National Council of Catholic Women, spoke with a number of sisters and lay associates in attendance, and participated in workshops and attended presentations at the event.

United Nations Sustainable Development Goals



Emerging Opportunities

ACROSS THE VARIOUS AREAS of human development studied, CRCC found a number of common themes about sisters' work on human development in the 21st century. These themes are shaped by trends in religious life, such as numbers of sisters, the presence of sisters from other countries in the United States and new partnerships. CRCC's primary research informs the following summative remarks about the challenges and opportunities that characterize US sisters' work in the area of human development.

Sisters' Leadership in Human Development

There are two organizing bodies of religious congregations of women in the United States: the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and the Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR). The origins of LCWR date back to 1956, when the Vatican's Congregation for Religious asked sisters in the United States to form a national conference. In 1971, a group of sisters formed the Consortium Perfectae Caritatis, which eventually became CMSWR. All sisters are well established in human development areas such as education and healthcare. During its research, CRCC tended to encounter sisters from LCWR congregations playing a prominent role in the areas of human trafficking, immigration, environment, impact investment and Native American ministry. This is not surprising, because LCWR communities have historically made up the majority of women religious in the United States. According to LCWR, the conference currently has about 1350 members, who represent nearly 80 percent of the approximately 45,600 women religious in the United States.

That said, there are also opportunities to foster CMSWR congregations' leadership on human development issues. Such opportunities could be promoted through events, like the Catholic Social Ministry Gathering, that have the backing of the Church and the support of Catholic laity. Conversations with several CMSWR sisters in attendance at the CSMG event suggested that they were learning about the global Church's position on social justice issues—particularly the ways those positions are grounded in Catholic spirituality and tradition. For example, a Vietnamese American sister from the midwest who was attending the meeting for the first time commented that while immigration issues pertained to her congregation and impacted the community they served, her congregation had limited education to support advocacy in this arena. Moreover, CSMG helped translate such issues into Catholic terms, as some CMSWR sisters had perceived them as political or secular concerns that were outside the realm of the Church.

Beyond the traditional LCWR and CMSWR leadership conferences, CRCC has observed an important emerging phenomenon: the rise of informal networks and associations among young sisters from the global south who arrive in the United States without a major superior or other leader from their country in the United States. Many of these sisters have been actively involved in social justice issues and human development affairs in their home countries. According to one expert, some of these sisters express feeling “out of place” and even marginalized from assemblies that are involved in human development work as a result of their more traditional religious habit. Moreover, as Arturo Chavez, president of the Mexican American Catholic College (MACC) in San Antonio noted, they also feel disconnected from the wider Church, while facing additional challenges related to cultural and language assimilation.² These issues are particularly significant in regions such as Southern California, where there are nearly 500 foreign-born Latin American sisters under the age of 40 in the Los Angeles archdiocese alone.

An example of one of these new organizations is the the Association of Hispanic Sisters in the United States (Asociación de Religiosas Hispanas en los Estados Unidos, or ARHEU). Once an informal, grassroots network, ARHEU received a grant from the GHR Foundation to become a formalized association of women religious, with biannual gatherings to build and deepen the organization’s network. ARHEU assists Latina sisters who enter the country without a major superior in the United States. The aim of such associations is to support sisters in continuing education and formation as they integrate into the United States, as well as to support their own work with other immigrant Latina families and communities. The Sisters Initiative may seek to build on such existing initiatives, exploring ways to empower sisters from global south working domestically with new immigrant populations.

Inter-congregational Partnerships

In the United States, where the number of Catholic sisters is decreasing (in 2016, the number of sisters was 47,170 compared to its peak in 1965 of 180,000), CRCC has also seen more inter-congregational coalitions and ministries that are focused on specific social issues of concern to particular communities of women religious. Some of the coalitions highlighted in this report, such as Sisters and Brothers of Immigrants in Chicago, have naturally formed out of collaborative grassroots work among various congregations. Other organizations are national networks but may be less formal, such as Sisters of Earth, which hosts a national conference every other year. Sisters working in the area of human trafficking have created the most extensive network, which connects US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking with Talitha Kum, a global network of consecrated women and men undertaking ministries in this area. As a transnational issue, human trafficking has spurred collaborations both locally and internationally.

While the impetus for these coalitions of sisters has been the pressure of their diminishing numbers in the US, many sisters have recognized this exigency as a blessing. Networking can allow for the creation of ministries that no one congregation could lead on its own. For instance, many congregations in the US collaborate on houses of hospitality for immigrants released from detention. In addition to creating ministries, many of these coalitions also push for systemic change through advocacy and activism. Savvy sisters know that their voices, images and presences can bring light to key social issues, change policies or hold the powers-that-be accountable. Examples of this prophetic activism include inter-congregational coalitions that engage in impact investing, US Sisters Against Human Trafficking, and NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice—especially NETWORK’s Nuns on the Bus tour.

The aging of sisters in the US has made it necessary for sisters to engage more actively with sisters from other parts of the globe. This imperative is also not new. For international congregations, the experiences of sisters from the south has inspired the development of ministries that address human development issues from a global perspective—like advocacy for peace-focused foreign policy or climate change awareness.

Lay Partnerships

CRCC found that the most prominent partners in sisters' ministries are the lay people who volunteer or work side-by-side with them. For instance, nonprofits founded by sisters such as NETWORK, a national Catholic social justice focused on lobbying efforts in the areas of economic justice, immigration reform, healthcare, peace making and ecology, are now run almost entirely by lay employees. Other coalitions such as the DC-based group Solidarity with Sisters, identify as lay "companions" to LCWR orders. This lay-religious collaboration is more prominent now, but not entirely new; Catholic lay associates have always played an important role in religious life. With sisters aging, however, reliance on the laity (Catholic and non-Catholic) has increased. In fact, many lay people now carry out the everyday operations of ministries founded by sisters and also are moving into strategic decision-making roles.

Several practical and spiritual concerns emerge from this shift to lay-led ministry work. The family obligations and social pressures that accompany lay life mean that lay workers require and expect higher salaries than sisters. At the same time, lay workers are rarely able to devote the same amount of time and energy that sisters typically dedicate to their ministries. Religious communities must respond to the needs of their lay workforce as well as determine how to run ministries with a limited labor capacity.

Sisters also wonder how they can continue to imbue their ministries with the charism of their religious communities even as the work is increasingly performed by lay people who don't have the spiritual formation that is an integral part of sisters' lives in religious community. Oftentimes, the laity who run day-to-day operations of sisters' ministries might not even identify as Catholic or with any religion. Questions thus emerge for communities regarding the watering down of the charism of their ministries. How might a community that is heavily reliant on lay workers continue to inculcate the "sister spirit" in the work the community does?

Non-Catholic Partnerships

The opportunity for networking expands beyond the Catholic world into partnerships with other religious non-governmental organizations (NGOs), secular NGOs, philanthropies and government—a phenomenon that has become more prominent since Vatican II. In fact, in US human development work, sisters may have stronger relationships with non-Catholic players within their ministerial fields, such as immigration law, than with other sisters doing the same work.

In their advocacy efforts to push for policies and legislation at local, state and federal levels, sisters have worked in collaboration with a diverse network of domestic and international faith-based and non-faith-based actors beyond the Catholic Church. These non-Catholic partnerships are especially significant in the area of human trafficking. For example, US Sisters Against Human Trafficking collaborates with national organizations such as End Child Prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT-USA) and the Polaris Project on various actions. Individual congregations have also sought out partnerships. For instance, the Task Force to End Modern Slavery, founded by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration, partnered with Breaking Free, one of the nation's leading organizations for working with victims and survivors of sex trafficking, to create "The Faces of Human Trafficking" video series.³

Individuals who work with religious congregations find that sisters respond quickly to the changing landscape of advocacy work, bring a grassroots perspective to development challenges and have an excellent capacity to network and build broad-based coalitions.

Human Development Issue Areas

Human Trafficking

The United States continues to be both a source of and destination country for human trafficking victims. The National Human Trafficking Hotline received 26,557 calls in 2017, with the highest number of reported cases in 2016 coming from California, followed by Texas and Florida.⁴ Although the common perception of human trafficking is that it is mainly a problem in less developed countries, 1,947 out of a total of 8,524 reported human trafficking cases recorded in 2017 involved US citizens. In their engagement with human trafficking, sisters are working on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals that focus on: Gender Equality (goal #5), Good Health and Well-Being (#3), Decent Work and Economic Growth (#8), and Partnerships (#17).



ADVOCACY. Sisters have long been involved in advocacy for policies and legislation at all levels of government (local, state and federal) that make human trafficking more difficult. In 2001, closely following the UN anti-trafficking treaty, the International Union of Superiors General (UISG) passed its resolution to address the abuse and sexual exploitation of women and children. Today, this expands to all forms of trafficking. In addition, they also advocate around this issue in the sphere of corporate social responsibility. For instance, many congregations have been pressuring hotels to work against trafficking in the hospitality industry by agreeing to a code of conduct established by ECPAT (End Child Prostitution and Trafficking). They have also inspired several key players in the hospitality industry to develop strategic solutions to make hotels more accountable for what transpires within their walls and on their grounds. In July 2016, the Congregation of St. Joseph gave a \$100,000 matching gift to the Exchange Initiative, which was founded by Nix Conference & Meeting Management, to launch the TraffickCam app, which allows travelers to anonymously photograph hotel rooms and upload data to a national law-enforcement database.⁵ Traffickers often post photographs of their victims posed in hotel rooms for online advertisements. The database of photos help determine where perpetrators of sex trafficking are committing their crimes and are used as evidence to find and prosecute perpetrators of crimes.



AWARENESS. Sisters also raise awareness in their parishes about human trafficking, especially by framing the problem in terms of Catholic social teachings and encouraging parishioners to have solidarity with those who suffer. Other education efforts engage the broader public with this issue in innovative ways. For instance, in January 2018, the La Crosse Task Force to End Modern Slavery, founded by the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Wisconsin, partnered with Breaking Free, a Minnesota-based non-profit, to produce an online video series titled "The Faces of Human Trafficking." The series serves as an online resource to educate human trafficking support workers as well as the general public and to give voice to trafficking survivors. In 2015, several congregations of Catholic sisters in Wisconsin purchased advertising space on local buses to raise awareness of the dangers of human trafficking in the state. The ads appeared on buses in

areas where trafficking was a more prominent problem. Other education efforts involve engaging public figures who advocate on behalf of trafficking victims. The Coalition of Catholic Organizations against Trafficking comprises approximately 30 international or national organizations, including 25 LCWR congregations, that meet annually to address human trafficking issues. Members of the coalition have sponsored training programs for police officers and emergency room personnel to help them identify victims of trafficking.

Several of the colleges and universities founded by women religious have sponsored open forums in collaboration with the US Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) Migration and Refugee Services on various dimensions of human trafficking. Among these collaborating institutions are: Notre Dame College of Maryland in Baltimore, Regis College in Boston, St. Joseph's College in Hartford, Mount St. Mary's University in Los Angeles and Marywood University in Scranton. Trinity University in Washington, D.C., a Catholic women's institution, sponsors a certificate program in human trafficking and, through its graduate students, furthers research on the issue.



SERVICE. In addition to education and awareness, numerous religious orders provide direct assistance to human trafficking victims, such as providing shelter and transitional housing for victims seeking to escape their traffickers. Since many victims also suffer from some form of addiction, religious orders administer recovery programs in these shelters. They also offer job training, life-skills and assistance to help victims complete their education.

US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, consisting of 68 member congregations, is a robust network of religious communities devoted to this issue. It is the US representative of the international network Talitha Kum, mentioned above. The organization comprises not only individual communities, but also forges links with other local, state and regional coalitions, including the Northern California Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, the Southern California Partners for Global Justice, and the Justice Conference of Women Religious. It also forms partnerships with groups outside of the Catholic world, including at the state and federal level. The intent of the coalition is to share information, collaborate on key issue areas or major projects and sponsor training programs.

SPOTLIGHT

THE ANTI-TRAFFICKING PROJECT of the National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) is a new initiative led by its inaugural president, Maribeth Stewart Blogoslawski. The initiative is a collaboration with the US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, and it serves to enhance awareness of trafficking and provide mentoring as well as direct financial support services to trafficking victims. When asked why NCCW decided to work with US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking, Blogoslawski remarked: "Sisters are extraordinarily effective in getting the message out, and having insight from direct experience, ... we saw no reason to reinvent the wheel when sisters already have experience in the area."

Discussion

Across all the development sectors addressed in this report, human trafficking is the area that is perhaps the most promising in terms of the impact that sisters can have, particularly because of sisters' strong coalition partnerships both within and beyond the Catholic world. This is an area in which the Sisters Initiative may want to engage more deeply with coalition groups such as US Catholic Sisters Against Human Trafficking in order to understand the shape and scope of the problem as well as the kinds of interventions that might be possible. The Sisters Initiative might also support sisters' existing engagement on the human trafficking issue in ways that can have specific impact on corporate hotel policy, which would resonate within the wider Hilton world.

Immigration

In the United States, immigration has historically been one of the most hotly contested issue areas, and US immigration policy affects a broad range of vulnerable populations—including refugees, undocumented immigrants and unaccompanied children—and overlaps with other areas such as human trafficking. Sisters have organized around issues related to immigration for many decades, and like the broad spectrum of the migration demographics they serve, the scope of their interventions is also wide and diverse. The key UN Sustainable Development Goals that sisters respond to in working on immigration issues include Reducing Inequality (#10), Sustainable Cities and Communities (#11), and Peace and Justice Through Strong Institutions (#16).

To a lesser degree, sisters' work on immigration also addresses the goals of Quality Education (#4) and Decent Work and Economic Growth (#8).



ADVOCACY. US sisters have been actively advocating for comprehensive immigration reform, calling on elected officials and representatives to garner support for reform at the local, state and congressional levels. While individual congregations are actively involved in these efforts, many religious communities collaborate and work in alliance with other groups such as the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, NETWORK, the Catholic Alliance for the Common Good, Interfaith Immigration Coalition, and CLINIC (Catholic Legal Immigration Center). Religious communities not only advocate for new policies but also use their cultural capital to voice and amplify their critiques of existing policies, such as the recent policy on separating and detaining families of immigrants crossing the US-Mexico border.



AWARENESS. Sisters working on immigration often find that their most important task is increasing their parishioners' awareness of the issue by holding workshops or paying for billboard advertisements that educate largely white suburban parishes about the Catholic position on immigration. Many of these efforts are carried out through regional coalitions as well. Ten communities of Catholic Sisters based in the Upper Mississippi River Valley issued a statement on "Welcoming Communities" and placed billboards across Iowa. Brothers and Sisters of Immigrants, based in Chicago, has forged collaborations between religious men and women through a series of workshops and meetings where participants share information, contacts, resources and tools to respond to immigration concerns in their local home parishes. The organization has invited bishops from other regions of the country with significant immigrant populations to speak with parishioners about the plight of immigrants and share Catholic discourses that call for compassionate immigration reform.



SERVICE. Besides advocacy and education, communities of women religious are active in serving immigrant populations in a variety of ways. They provide pastoral care programs inside immigration detention centers and jails, and offer pro-bono legal assistance services to immigrants through groups like Catholic Legal and Immigration Center (CLINIC), Casa Cornelia and Project Hope. Some sisters accompany people through their court proceedings, participating in Court Watch programs as daily witnesses to the plight of detainees and others moving through federal immigration courts.

Houses of hospitality are also another significant means through which sisters are involved in serving vulnerable immigrant populations. Some communities convert vacant rectories or unused properties to provide housing for immigrants and refugees from the Middle East and other strife-plagued regions. For instance, the School Sisters of Notre Dame provided housing to a Syrian refugee family in a vacant house in their parish. Bethany House of Hospitality, supported by 28 congregations, is a house of hospitality serving young adult women who otherwise would be transferred from juvenile detention centers to adult detentions centers at age 18.⁶ While there are many such anecdotal examples, little information is available on the full extent of such service programs.

Discussion

Immigration is a robust area for sisters, who have formed some regional networks to address this issue. But immigration ministries generally undertake independent work on service provision and advocacy work across the wide variety of issues that fall under the heading of “immigration,” such as refugees, undocumented migrants, unaccompanied children and DACA/Dreamers.

Unlike human trafficking, which tends to attract bipartisan consensus, immigration is a hotly contested political topic in the US. This often requires innovative collaborations in which one group of sisters might work on the inside of a detention center providing pastoral care to migrants, while another group protests policies in front of the detention center. Sisters show their political savviness in how they work both collaboratively and independently for the benefit of immigrants.

The highly politicized nature of immigration in the US partly explains why, even as sisters do significant amounts of advocacy work to help migrants, their efforts are not organized through a central coalition group such as US Sisters Against Human Trafficking. If the Sisters Initiative explores engaging with sisters in this area, the Foundation will have to carefully decide how it wants to approach the politics of this issue, what areas it wants to target, and what its desired outcomes will be. Within the larger secular immigration movement, the landscape of funding from major progressive funders is robust. If the Sisters Initiative seeks to engage sisters in this area, the role of sisters in relation to other players should be noted.

SPOTLIGHT

SISTERS AND BROTHERS of Immigrants (SBI) is a coalition founded in 2007 in the greater Chicago area by Catholic sisters that has expanded to include more than 70 member congregations, including communities of religious brothers, and associate members of religious congregations. They are involved in advocacy efforts on various immigrant issues at the local, state and national level, meeting with senators and representatives; engaging in public witness to raise awareness in local parish communities of the need for immigration reform; and performing pastoral care by supporting immigrants held in detention centers. According to member Sr. Dorothy Pagosa, the social justice coordinator for the Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of St. Francis, the decision to engage brothers on the issue came out of an understanding that brothers, although playing an important role in immigrant communities, had fewer networks and resources to assist in their ministry. Through these broad-based coalitions, as well as through their interfaith engagements, SBI is engaged in educating mainly white suburban parish communities regarding US immigration policy through a Catholic social teachings perspective.

A pair of recent initiatives that emerged out of the SBI coalition are the Viator House of Hospitality and Bethany House. Financially supported by member communities of SBI, both Chicago-based houses of hospitality provide transitional housing and pastoral care for young adult men and women transitioning out of detention centers for immigrants. Both organizations work with secular legal services institutions such as the National Immigrant Justice Center, which offers pro bono legal assistance to the young residents, and the Young Center of the University of Chicago, which advocates on behalf of children in detention.⁷

Environment

Creation Care/ Climate Justice

The UN SDGs and Pope Francis' encyclical letter on the environment, *Laudato Si*, brought greater attention to the reality of climate change through its blending of secular development language and Catholic social teachings. Sustainability is the key component of the UN's development goals, and in *Laudato Si*, Francis also refers to "integral and sustainable human development."⁸ Both frameworks recognize that people in poverty bear the brunt of the effects of climate change, with the SDGs specifically targeting assistance to the least developed countries and focusing on women, youth and marginalized communities. Both Pope Francis and the SDGs speak of the Earth as our common home.

In their engagement with environmental issues, sisters are aligned with Catholic Social teaching and are working on the SDGs that focus on Climate Action (#13), Clean Water and Sanitation (#6), and Life on Land (#15). Here again, partnerships and networking play a prominent role in strengthening the engagements of individual communities, especially in their advocacy efforts, though sisters working on these issues are not organized through any central coalition.



ADVOCACY. In the recent past, several noteworthy partnerships have formed around care for the environment. For instance, "Walk for Water" was hosted by the Sisters of Mercy in the summer of 2017 in response to the US withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement. In addition to prayer, activities at the event included discussion of the Great Lakes ecosystem, readings and discussions of Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si*, as well as solidarity-building with Native communities, who were invited to speak on water issues in their local communities. Another coalition is Sisters of Earth, an informal network of women religious who meet bi-annually to share how different regions have been impacted by environmental degradation. A recent concern of the group has also been to build an alliance with Native American communities on environmental issues.



AWARENESS AND SERVICES. In addition to direct activism and advocacy work, sisters also invest in the green movement through innovation, particularly in the area of sustainable energy. Often, their initiatives focus on using their own communities and convents as exemplary sites of ecological sustainability. Bridge Between—founded by the Dominican Sister Caroline Sullivan of Sinsinawa, Wisconsin—is an award-winning sustainable homestead and retreat center. It offers individual and group retreats, spiritual direction, therapeutic massage, garden shares and daily lunch and dinner. The Sisters of Providence opened the White Violet Center for Eco-Justice at Saint Mary-of-the-Woods, Indiana, where the congregation engages with youth through internships and volunteer programs to teach agriculture and horticulture practices. Through these various engagements, sisters show themselves to be closely aligned with Pope Francis' idea of integral ecology, which brings a holistic understanding of the human, social and spiritual dimensions of the environment. In opening these centers as retreat spaces for the laity, sisters engage the public also by raising awareness on environmental issues and sustainability.

Discussion

Investment in environmental ministries could harness the broad interest of Catholic sisters on this issue by supporting an informal national network to help sisters leverage their efforts for greater impact. There are potential partnership areas with Native American communities, as well as with Millennials who are interested in caring for the Earth in tangible ways—and also, potentially, in the spirituality of Catholic sisters.

A challenge to consider, however, is that environmentalism is a theologically contested area for sisters. A number of Catholic sisters have been on the leading edge of theological conversations that try to bridge theology with scientific advancements in our understanding of the universe. Such theological efforts ground eco-spirituality, but also are criticized for putting creation rather than the divinity of Christ at the center of the faith. Ideas and practices around the divinity of Christ were one of the doctrinal issues investigated during the Apostolic Visitation of Women Religious. While Pope Francis' *Laudato Si* has opened the Church's discussion of environmentalism to such ideas, eco-spirituality is still a contested area, especially among conservative Catholics.

SPOTLIGHT

SISTERS OF THE SERVANTS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY (IHM) of Monroe, Michigan have identified sustainability as their moral mandate for the 21st century. Prompted by reflection on how to best serve their aging community, they also sought to benefit the local community and its health through education and sustainability. In practice, this imperative entailed the religious community collectively deciding to renovate their motherhouse and to align their campus and community life with principles of sustainable living. The design principles guiding the renovation of the IHM motherhouse, a massive 376,000-square-foot area, included energy-efficient heating plants, geothermal systems, greywater recycling that reduces freshwater consumption by half, and a land stewardship plan that converted eleven acres of lawn to meadow and prairie to improve the biodiversity of the site and protect existing natural habitat. In addition, the order sold 120 acres of land to La-Z-Boy, Inc. with the agreement that the corporation would construct a new, green-certified corporate headquarters with a geothermal system and protect the nearby oak woods. The motherhouse now serves as an eco-learning center where the public and other local institutions can learn about sustainable living and best-practices in ecological conservation.⁹

Indigenous Populations

Native American Communities

In their engagement with Native American populations, sisters are working on the UN SDGs related to Peace Justice and Strong Institutions (#16), Reducing Inequalities (#10), Decent Work and Economic Growth (#8), and Gender Equality (#5).

The needs of Native American populations are great. Native people have historically been underserved by the federal government, especially considering the magnitude of the issues impacting the Native community. Nearly 30 percent of single-race American Indians and Alaska Natives were living in poverty in 2014. This is the highest rate of any racial group.¹⁰ Only 18.5 percent of adults in this demographic group have obtained a Bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, 33 percent of the overall adult population has a tertiary degree or higher.¹¹ Adequate sanitation facilities are lacking in approximately 145,000 American Indian and Alaska Native homes (or 36 percent). Of these homes approximately 26,000 (or 6.5 percent) lack access to a safe water supply and/or waste disposal facilities, compared to less than 1 percent of homes for the U.S. general population.¹² According to statistics released by Indian Health Services in 2012, suicide was the second leading cause of death—2.5 times the national rate—for Native youth in the 15- to 24-year-old age group.^{13, 14}

Today, Native people (whose primary race is given as Native American or Alaska Native) compose about 2 percent of the population of the United States. About 20 percent of Native Americans identify as Catholic. According to USCCB demographic data, 3.5 percent of all Catholics in the United States are Native American.¹⁵ More than 340 parishes in the United States serve predominantly Native American congregations.

Native American Catholics are less likely than other groups to become nuns or priests. Based on figures at the beginning of the millennium, there were 34 Native American women in religious orders and 27 Native American priests.¹⁶

There are also unresolved historical tensions between Native people and the Church that affect how Catholic sisters are able to engage with this population. Fostering better engagement between sisters and Native populations therefore requires, from the outset, deep cultural sensitivity and awareness of the history of colonization and exploitation that has shaped the relationship between indigenous populations and the Church.

Historical Background

The early European colonization of the Americas and its effects on the Native population has been characterized as a genocide. From the 1600s onwards, colonial and then federal governments tried to assimilate Native populations into European cultural norms. Education, typically through Christian boarding schools, played a primary role in this acculturation process.

Nearly all of the 100,000 Native American children educated in such schools were forcibly removed from their families on reservations and sent hundreds of miles away, where they were forced to convert to Christianity and learn a trade. They were also prohibited from speaking their indigenous language and engaging in Native cultural practices. A common imperative that was used to describe the mission of the boarding school system was “kill the Indian and save the man.”

Many Native children suffered severe trauma at the schools, where they were pressed into grueling labor and suffered severe punishments at the hands of clergy and administrators. Inadequate sanitation, insufficient funding for meals and overcrowded conditions often resulted in widespread infectious disease. Native children also suffered from both mental and sexual abuse. This forcible conversion and suppression of indigenous languages and cultures continued through the 1970s.

The trauma experienced in these boarding schools—as well as the resulting fracture of communal bonds and loss of cultural identity and power—has left pervasive intergenerational effects on Native populations, including high rates of alcoholism, substance use disorders, PTSD and suicide. Consequently, many Native communities have negative views of the Catholic Church—and of women religious, many of whom founded and ran the schools to which Native children were abducted.

Advocacy groups, such as the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition, have been formed to address these issues. The organization comprises more than 100 Native and non-Native members and organizations committed to healing from this history. They actively invite churches, includ-

ing the Catholic Church, to join the coalition as an ally by taking specific national and global actions.

There are many Native Americans who embrace the Catholic Church, while still valuing their indigenous heritage. Popes Benedict and Francis have apologized for the Church's abuses, contributing to an on-going process of reconciliation. Today, many Native parishes blend their culture with their faith. For instance, Native American Catholic worship might incorporate rituals and symbols from Native cultures. Some Native Catholics also conduct prayer, song and mass in native tongues; however, masses in most Native churches are conducted in English because of the loss of languages and other forms of cultural memory.

Discussion

According to Native Americans for Philanthropy, a non-grant-making partner organization, philanthropic funding for the Native population remains less than 0.5 percent of annual foundation grant dollars.¹⁸ A few foundations, however, are seeking to address this gap. For instance, the Better Way Foundation's Healthy Children, Healthy Nations initiative supports early childhood development programs and nutrition programming, and the foundation's partnership with the American Indian Catholic Mission Schools Program promotes youth high school completion and enrollment in post-secondary programs. The Bush Foundation's Native Nation Building strategic initiative supports 23 Native nations in the North and South Dakotas and Minnesota region through various programming.¹⁹

Native American ministry is an area where a large investment by the Sisters Initiative could have a significant impact, due both to the great needs of Native people and to the small population of Catholic Native Americans. This assumes there is an infrastructure that can handle and use that investment (i.e. an organization that could distribute smaller grants) and that interventions by Catholic sisters would be welcome within Native communities. Choosing whether to invest in this area depends on the Sisters Initiative's broader philanthropic orientation: Does it want to invest in areas where it may be able to make a larger impact on small populations, or does it want to try to effect systems-level change to address societal issues that impact large populations? In what ways can the Sisters Initiative fill gaps or collaborate in unique ways with other foundations such as the Better Way and Bush foundations that also support human development among Native American communities?

SPOTLIGHT

Tekakwitha Conference

The Tekakwitha Conference, a Catholic institution founded to support Christian ministry among Native populations, plays a prominent role in the Catholic Church's engagement with Native populations, and is a potential partner in ongoing efforts to bring about reconciliation and healing for Native Catholic populations.

Founded in 1937 in the name of Saint Kateri Tekakwitha (1656-1680), a Native woman of the Mohawk tribe who was canonized by the Vatican in 1980, the Tekakwitha Conference membership meets annually to engage and address Catholic Native American issues such as building Native American Catholic leadership, reconciliation with the Church, and fostering peace and justice in communities.

Keeping in mind the sometimes tense relationship between Native American communities and the Church, the Sisters Initiative might foster deeper engagement between women religious and Native populations through organizations such as the Tekakwitha Conference and its broader networks. Indeed, the Sisters Initiative might take advantage of the fact that women religious such as Sr. Kateri Mitchell of the Sisters of St. Anne, who like Saint Kateri Tekakwitha is a member of the Mohawk tribe, are actively involved with the conference.

Las Casas

Las Casas: Dominicans in Ministry with Native Americans supports Dominican sisters who minister to Native Americans while affirming the right of Native people to express their indigenous culture, language and religion.¹⁷ The organization's work falls broadly within the area of legal advocacy for sisters, but they also give grants and scholarships to support their ministries, many of which are in underserved rural parishes and towns.

Impact Investment

Responsible Investing

Impact investing and shareholder advocacy is another area where Catholic sisters are engaging in human development work and having robust effects both domestically and internationally. These initiatives include reshaping religious communities' investment funds on Wall Street (such as divesting from companies that engage in the production of firearms for civilian use), and working with corporations to encourage labor practices that eschew modern slavery and provide fair wages. Sisters are also working to encourage the adoption of ecologically friendly production methods as well as direct investment through loans in the communities sisters serve. Prominent congregations that have historically pioneered such approaches include the Adrian Dominican Sisters,²⁰ Franciscan Sisters of Mary,²¹ and Mercy Sisters.²² For instance, as part of the larger Mercy Housing initiative established in 1981, the Mercy Sisters founded the Mercy Loan Fund to administer reliable, flexible funding to socially responsible community developers in support of Mercy Housing's mission. These and other funding instruments have made Mercy Housing one of the largest nonprofit owners, managers and developers of affordable housing in the country.

In addition to their individual ministries, many of these congregations have worked collaboratively from the outset, forming coalition groups across the country. Mercy Housing, for instance, includes other communities such as Daughters of Charity and the Sisters of St. Joseph.

Discussion

The challenge today is that many communities are seeing their savings dwindle now that they are pulling money out for retirement. The particular charism and ministry that sisters were involved in during their most robust years also has an impact on their existing savings. For example, sisters that established profitable health systems, such as the Sisters of St. Joseph, were able to sell these ministries and maintain a robust retirement portfolio, while sisters running less profitable education ministries now struggle in retirement. These disparities therefore have an effect on the financial solvency of communities and their ability to engage in impact investment.

Moreover, with fewer vocations, there are less earnings to sustain retirement portfolios, and fewer younger sisters to spearhead shareholder advocacy. Many of these initiatives, such as Mercy Housing, are now being led by lay people, with as much grounding as possible in the congregations' charism. The upcoming CRCC report on long-term planning in religious congregations will explore some of these issues more fully.

If this is an area that the Sisters Initiative is interested in engaging, questions to consider are how best to support impact investing and what short-term and long-term payoffs would characterize a successful venture into this area.

Implications for the Catholic Sisters Initiative

CATHOLIC SISTERS' ENGAGEMENT in domestic human development affairs is robust and diverse. Sisters advocate for better policies, raise awareness of issues and provide direct service within the realms of human trafficking, immigration and the environment. They also are involved in Native American ministries and impact investing. Each of the areas focused in this report has potential opportunities as well as considerations to take into account while making philanthropic investment. Considerations include whether sisters are part of strong coalition partnerships within and without the Catholic world, as well as political, theological and historical sensitivities within certain issue areas. Once the Catholic Sisters Initiative decides which sector to pursue, a baseline study on that sector would provide more comprehensive data on sisters' work, helping guide its giving in this sector.

At the same time, a remaining concern for religious communities is how to sustain their ministries into the future, at a time when most if not all of the sisters in these communities are aging or nearing retirement. Moreover, while they may not have new vocations to religious life, religious communities do see the continuation of their ministries as vital to the realization of their charism. In tackling these issues, sisters have increasingly relied on inter-congregational networks, as well as several non-traditional players as partners in their ministries, including Catholic laity and non-Catholic partnerships within civil society.

Such coalition-building could be a significant means through which the Sisters Initiative can enhance its impact in certain issue areas. This is a key recommendation highlighted in CRCC's engagement with the first strategy of the Sisters Initiative. There will be fewer sisters in the United States in the future, and the best way to move forward in "responding to the times" is through these coalitions of sisters and other stakeholders, including laity.

The Sisters Initiative could also be instrumental in developing solutions to some of the challenges these coalitions face. For instance, even as communities come together around a certain issue, they struggle to identify their shared resources in order to amplify their impact. These resources include infrastructure like facilities and vehicles, and intangibles like expertise, experience and social networks. Concrete interventions such as systems development analyses to identify resources that communities seek to share could help to scale up the capacity of these particular ministries.

Moreover, coalition-building is not always easy. There could be underlying unresolved and unidentified cultural differences across groups, for example. This could also add a new layer of difficulty to existing secular-religious coalitions where religious literacy and competency is generally low and there is sometimes a hostility towards religious institutions. The Sisters Initiative as a third party might seek to facilitate such difficult conversations and further enhance solidarity and understanding within such partnerships.

As noted at the outset, CRCC found that as sisters age, they increasingly rely on the laity (Catholic and non-Catholic); many lay people now carry out the everyday operations of the ministries founded by sisters and they also are moving into strategic decision-making roles. This issue is perhaps the most significant one for the Sisters Initiative as it considers ways to empower North American sisters who are involved in domestic human development issues.

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