

## **Case Statement – Support the Sisters Campaign**

For more than 130 years, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Springfield have been a mainstay of education and community ministry in Western Massachusetts and throughout New England. More than 1,000 Sisters have served in this area, primarily as teachers in local Catholic schools. In addition, throughout their history, the Sisters have taken on the needs of the poorest and most marginalized members of the community, bringing to life their mission of *uniting neighbor with neighbor and neighbor with God, that all may be one.*

Nearly two dozen Sisters are active in education today, and their presence in other ministries continues to touch some of the neediest in our society. With programs including outreach to the disadvantaged, prison ministries and even building schools as far away as Haiti, they live their commitment to, “...*be informed, compassionate advocates for people who are poor or alienated, and to be responsible, concerned stewards of the earth...*” This commitment often takes them to places where needs are great, and salaries are small or non-existent.

### **Education – A Legacy of Teaching**

Thousands of people have benefitted over the past 130 years from the considerable teaching skills and effort the Sisters put forth. From elementary schools to Elms College in Chicopee and the College of St. Joseph in Rutland, Vermont, and all levels in between, Sisters have made a meaningful impact on lives throughout New England, serving in more than 75 schools in Massachusetts, Vermont and Rhode Island. Perhaps it was a Sister who welcomed you to the world of learning as a beloved kindergarten teacher, prepared you for college as a valued high school teacher, or helped you navigate college and life beyond it. Even if you were never taught by a Sister of St. Joseph, you can certainly appreciate the impact their efforts have had: without their involvement, many local Catholic schools would never have been sustained. These schools have been dynamic institutions in our community, and for many families, have represented the ideal learning environment. For many years, local Catholic schools charged little or no tuition, opening their doors to all who desired this education to further themselves – including many poor and immigrant families.

### **Beyond Education – Ministering to Those in Need**

From their earliest days in Springfield, the Sisters created new ministries where the clergy or other religious were not present. Throughout their history, they have reached out to those most in need: the poor, the elderly, the infirm, the incarcerated, and more. Each place they have touched has been made better by the Sisters’ involvement. In Springfield’s North End, many of the community’s poorest children and families are served by the Gray House, a ministry that provides food, clothing and critical services to those in need. Holyoke’s Homework House, another Sisters of St. Joseph ministry, serves as a lifeline for the area’s neediest children.

The Sisters can be found in a variety of services to the spiritually, physically, and mentally challenged. Their presence is found in nursing homes and other areas of healing ministries. They truly are “*serving the dear neighbor*” wherever they can be Christ’s healing compassionate presence to the sick and suffering. As pastoral ministers, Sisters serve in parishes, schools, health care facilities, prisons and private homes, providing spiritual guidance and care to those in need. For the homebound, a Sister of St. Joseph pastoral minister may be the only direct connection with the Church.

In all their ministries, they advocate for justice, dignity, and rights for all, especially for the poor and disadvantaged. They have been a strong voice for reconciliation, non-violence, justice and welfare reform, particularly for women and children. Throughout their history, the Sisters have been called upon to support themselves financially, although the majority of their work has been done in settings where pay is meager or non-existent.

## **A Time of Critical Need**

Today, the Sisters are at a frightening crossroads. Current financial projections indicate that without significant action, within a few short years, they would not be able to address even the most basic needs of retirement. With a membership of nearly 220, and a median age of 76, they have neither the time nor the available workforce to generate a safe, secure retirement. According to the National Religious Retirement Office, the Sisters of St. Joseph are among the most underfunded religious communities in the country.

Leadership teams past and present have toiled faithfully to secure the congregation's financial status. Even with the careful management of their funds throughout the years, the congregation faced a \$40 million dollar shortfall between savings on hand, and what would be needed to care for the Sisters for the remainder of their lives. The Sisters did not stand idly by waiting for others to rescue them. Instead, they took on the hard task of deeply cutting their already lean budgets; eliminating programs and services for Sisters; consolidating efforts for greater efficiency; and aggressively pursuing new fundraising paths. In a move that was most painful of all, and that has dramatically changed the way many Sisters will live, they have sold their beloved home of 117 years, Mont Marie.

The result of these efforts has been to dramatically reduce their retirement shortfall. Knowing that the Sisters have done all that they can, a committed group of lay leaders have banded together to launch *Support the Sisters*, a campaign to honor the Sisters' legacy of service and secure their future.

The Sisters have lovingly committed themselves to a life of poverty for the benefit of others, but there are still basic bills to be paid. Health care, food and other day-to-day expenses that all incur are faced by the Sisters of St. Joseph as well. Most Sisters do not have the advantage, however, of earning a wage that allows for retirement savings.

## **An Opportunity to Thank the Sisters – The Time is Now**

Although they are blessed by the generosity of loyal supporters and are living as frugally as possible, it is not enough to sustain their long-term needs. The reality is, more must be done now to ensure that the aging Sisters will be able to live out their lives with the security and dignity they have so rightfully earned. To this end, we are embarking on an effort to address at least \$5 million in necessary funding support of their modest retirement needs.

On behalf of the Sisters, we now turn to those who have benefitted directly from their caring, compassionate work, or who recognize the value this work has on our community as a whole. We pray that those the Sisters have touched over the years will pledge their commitment by joining us to *Support the Sisters*. It will be a meaningful opportunity to say thank you and to ensure the future for the Sisters of St. Joseph.