Women Religious in a Changing Urban Landscape:
The Work of Catholic Sisters in Metropolitan Cleveland

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Purpose of the research

1. What is the current status of Sisters’ ministries in the changing environment of Cleveland?
2. What do Sisters themselves see as the challenges, needs, and vision going forward?
3. To what extent are Sisters collaborating as a way to sustain their work?
4. What strategies are needed to advance the Religious Communities goal moving forward?
5. What can we learn about the unique approach and spirit in the ministries of Women Religious?
Population migrates to suburbs, including Catholics

**Total Population**

![Graph showing population migration from 1950 to 2007 for Cleveland and Rest of County.]

**Registered Catholic Population**

![Graph showing registered Catholic population migration from 1950 to 2007 for Cleveland and Rest of County.]


Parishioners in churches getting the ax ask, why us?

27 parishes will close
41 parishes involved in 18 mergers
50 fewer parishes

As the result of a nearly two year consultative process Bishop Richard Lennon has issued notice to these parishes that they must close or merge as directed by June 30, 2010.
### Mapping the presence of Women Religious

- **Initial effort to inventory the ministries of Sisters showed** -
  - Women Religious serving in areas of greatest need -- **288**
    - Sisters from 17 orders in active ministry, most prominent in areas of poverty
  - Ministry sites include but also reach far beyond the “parish” structure

- **Of the 38 parishes with WR serving there** –
  - 7 closing (involving 8 WR)
  - 5 to merge and stay open (involving 8 WR)
  - 26 to remain open (involving 31 WR)
Distribution of Women Religious, Selected Parish Locations, and Cluster Boundaries
(N = 288 Women Religious in 133 Sites)
Survey of Sisters-logistics

- Mail survey combining closed-ended and open-ended items, based in part on survey used in South Carolina (Mark Small, Clemson Univ., 2008)
- Received endorsement from Conference of Religious Leadership (CORL) in June 2009
- Study approved by CWRU Institutional Review Board in August 2009
- Began with estimated population of Sisters in Diocese (1,100), but focused in on approx. 360 serving a direct service ministry in Cuyahoga County
Women Religious in active ministry

- Women from 15 Orders participated in the survey (n=164); over half were Ursuline Sisters or Sisters of Notre Dame

- Respondents were 64 years of age on average, and 16% were 75 or older

- Nearly half (46%) began their career in ministry in northeast Ohio 1964-74; median 19 years of experience in current ministry

- Over 80% hold a graduate degree

- Nearly 60% of Sisters reside in the same geographic area where their ministry is located
### Diversity of ministries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Ministry</th>
<th>Percentage of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education (grades preschool to post-secondary)</td>
<td>42%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Religious education (i.e., RCIA, DRE, liturgy)</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Services (Relief, refugees, emergency or victims assistance, food and nutritional assistance, residential or custodial care)</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administration – Congregational, Diocesan Offices</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospice and healthcare</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational support</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling, family services, and adult education</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreat/spirituality and Intercession</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- 99% of sisters reported being involved in more than one ministry
- Over half reported 2 ministries, one-quarter reported 3 ministries, and 13% reported 4 ministries
Sisters work long hours and serve many

- Sisters report working an average of 41 hours/week (range: 7-80 hours weekly)
  - 21% work < 30 hours/week
  - 43% work 30-40 hours/week
  - 37% work >40 hours/week

- Persons served annually by ministries
  - 19% serve less than 100
  - 44% serve 100-499
  - 12% serve 500-999
  - 25% serve 1,000 or more
### Diverse set of target groups – special populations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Populations</th>
<th>% Identifying as their primary population</th>
<th>% Reporting that their ministry serves this population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-income families</td>
<td>27.4%</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ill and the dying</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Homeless or at-risk</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmentally disabled</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug/alcohol users</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>19.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims of domestic violence</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Former prisoners</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrants/refugees</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incarcerated</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Sisters are collaborating in ministry

- 71% engaged in collaboration
  - 45% engaged with Sisters from other Orders
  - 48% engaged with Diocesan organizations
  - 34% engaged with faith-based organizations
  - 41% engaged with nonprofit or governmental organizations

- Why collaborate?
  - 66% of Sisters see this as way to serve clients better; few see as way to access funding or leverage resources
Subgroup of ministries have sustainability plans

- Succession plan in place
- Someone can take place
- Strategic plan in place
- Nonprofit committed
Findings

- Sisters’ ministries face multiple challenges
  - Tension between mission and money
  - New streams of funding needed
  - Many unknowns due to reconfiguration
- Some ministries are at particular risk - smaller-scale, and in inner-city
- Some areas need attention: Seniors, esp. homebound, young adults, individuals who have lost faith during reconfiguration, families with school-age kids, immigrants