

RELIGIOUS FORMATION CONFERENCE

2020 ANNUAL REPORT



*faith + resilience*





## *mission*

The Religious Formation Conference educates and strengthens formators in their ministry of formation. The RFC engages religious communities with timely resources, services, and experiences that support initial and ongoing formation, that are responsive to an emerging future, in prophetic witness to Gospel values through personal and communal transformation.

## *Vision*

The Religious Formation Conference will engage women and men religious in a variety of vibrant resources, services, and experiences that bring our rich religious heritage into interaction with the contemporary and cultural realities of our world by:

- Promoting open, contemplative and collaborative dialogue;
- Modeling and encouraging inclusivity and respect for diversity;
- Welcoming inter-generational and inter-cultural viewpoints; and
- Responding to God's ongoing invitation to the "new" of religious life.



## from the executive director

Years ago in junior high science class, I recall being puzzled by the fact that all things are in constant motion. Tending toward the literal, I wondered why my desk wasn't moving. It was hard to visualize electrons spinning in atoms while the desk seemed to be perpetually still. While I understand gravitational and electromagnetic forces a bit more now, the mystery remains unresolved (and unpursued) in my mind.

Any stability in this past year was truly an optical illusion! Though the pandemic seemed to grind everything to a standstill, the fear and suffering that followed stirred deep feelings of sorrow in each of us. The empty highways and airways gave a respite to global warming, but there were few other quantifiable benefits to the months of shutdown.

At the Conference, we, too, found ourselves struggling to adapt to rapid change in the spring and summer of 2020. We quickly transitioned work to our homes and meetings and programs to the online Zoom platform.

**Faced with a choice between shutdown and adaptation, we opted for the latter in service to our members and in service to religious life.**

These days, as the yellow-green of new spring leaves continue to color our formerly dull vistas, we begin to ask ourselves what new life might look like. How will we be transformed by the many months of individual, communal, and societal suffering? What does it mean to roll away the stone of the tomb?

The changes we face as a Conference staff, and the changes that our members face in their communities, are a microcosm of those of the larger global society. Our upcoming office move and staff changes, while significant and impactful to us, need to be seen in perspective with the massive changes in our world. We are called to let go of old assumptions, to be nimble with change, and to be creative unto infinity.

And in the midst of constant motion, we seek the still point, so eloquently penned by T.S. Eliot:

*At the still point of the turning world.  
Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards;  
at the still point, there the dance is,  
But neither arrest nor movement.  
And do not call it fixity,  
Where past and future are gathered.  
Neither movement from nor towards,  
Neither ascent nor decline.  
Except for the point, the still point,  
There would be no dance,  
and there is only the dance.*

- T.S. Eliot

*Ellen Dauwer, SC*

Ellen Dauwer, SC  
Executive Director



*“When we learn how to become **resilient**, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience.”*

- Jaeda Dewalt





# the year in review

## AN OVERVIEW OF 2020 AT THE RELIGIOUS FORMATION CONFERENCE

**2020 was a challenging year.** From the COVID-19 pandemic to racial unrest to political strife, the year presented many obstacles. Religious communities and their formation processes were not immune from the impact of these difficult currents.

**Amid dark days, however, the Religious Formation Conference — because of the incredible faith and resilience of member communities — came together to be hope in a world in need of light and love.**

As our Congress 2019 theme foretold, we continue to strive to embody *Courageous Hope* for a world in desperate need of Christ’s Good News of justice, love, and peace.

In what ways did the Conference work to cultivate communities of faith and resilience? As this year-in-

review demonstrates, the RFC stood boldly at the forefront of nurturing spaces for those in religious life to come together to discern the unfolding path before them. In some instances, the Conference added programming to meet the challenges of the time. In others, it adapted or scaled back given the realities of coming together during a pandemic.

**Through it all, we were inspired by the creative and innovative ways we were able to be church in digital spaces. These were holy and sacred spaces, to be sure.**

Online community took root, virtual dialogue and learning took hold, and opportunities for growth and transformation still flourished. In extraordinary times, we did extraordinary things. The following are a few highlights.

**Conference webinars** continued to be popular programming in 2020. In fact, our webinars saw a marked increase in attendance last year. We routinely had between **500-750 participate** in webinars (one webinar nearly surpassed **1,000!**). This is in large part due to the excellent quality of our presenters and the desire for members to engage important topics related to formation and

consecrated life. Ongoing formation webinars in 2020 included:

- Lent: The Face of the Mercy of God (*Dianne Bergant, CSA, PhD*)
- Seeing with Resurrection Eyes (*Maria Benavides*)
- The Cosmic Paschal Mystery (*Sharon Zayoc, OP*)
- Facilitating the Newly Emerging Religious Life: Our Role at the Graced Crossroads (*Ted Dunn, PhD*)

The RFC also hosted some **online information sessions**. From a membership-themed session to overviews of the *Together* program, the information sessions allowed members to learn about upcoming programs, ask questions, and connect with others interested in the same opportunities.

As the pandemic persisted, the Conference decided to sponsor **a series of conversations around formation/religious life and the challenges presented by COVID-19**. Religious leaders, formators and others were asking questions about how to continue to do this work in these challenging times. Virtual breakout rooms allowed conversation partners to drill down into topics and explore best practices together. The Conference



Maria Benavides’ webinar, *Seeing with Resurrection Eyes*, served as a reminder of the often difficult journey many immigrants in the U.S. face. In what ways does our faith call us into solidarity with the immigrant experience?



was amazed at how popular (and we hope helpful) these online discussions were as **50 or more participated** in each of the following sessions:

- Impact of COVID-19 on Newer Members
- Key Learnings from this Time of Pandemic
- Impact of Technology on Formation Process
- Changes/adaptations to the Formation Program

In addition to these gatherings, the Conference hosted a digital conversation among those in initial formation titled **Newer Religious and the Impact of COVID-19**. We were blown away by the response as over **100 newer religious participated** in the conversation. Attendees remarked how life-giving the session was for them as it allowed them to connect, dialogue about important issues, and build community with others traversing the same joys and challenges.

The first **ForMission** session of 2020 was held in person at the Oblate School of Theology and featured the following presenters: *Janice Bachman, OP; Arturo Chavez, PhD; Linda Gibler, OP; John Markey, OP*. Given the strong relational component of the **ForMission Program**, the Conference decided to postpone the May in-person session in 2020 due to pandemic health and safety concerns.

Over the course of the year staff adjusted the program's timeline and delayed the incoming class to 2021. Participants connected in August through a Zoom session and continued their learning with the support of the team members.

The **Life Commitment Program** also moved online last year. **23 women and men** participated and the community featured participants from several different countries. Those in attendance even had a virtual "hang out room" to socialize and get to know each other in between sessions. The Conference was delighted to have the following presenters at the program:

- Religious Life as a Prophetic Enterprise in the 21st Century (*Charlene Diorka, SSJ*)
- Vow of Obedience (*Carole Riley, CDP*)
- Vow of Celibacy (*Mary Pat Garvin, RSM*)
- Vow of Poverty (*John Barker, OFM*)
- Community as Living Witness to the Incarnation (*Connie Schoen, OP*)

Given the incredible success of the virtual Life Commitment Program, the RFC re-envisioned the **Orientation to Formation Program** so that it could be offered online, too. Under the facilitation of *Maco Cassetta, CND* and *Paul English, CSB*

TOP L TO R:  
The Conference enjoys holding programs at the Oblate School of Theology in San Antonio.  
Linda Gibler, OP presents material at one of last year's ForMission sessions.  
Orientation to Formation attendees gathered online for the 2020 program via Zoom.  
BOTTOM:  
ForMission participants listen intently during one of their winter sessions.



*“Sometimes **resilience** arrives in the moment you discover your own unshakeable goodness.”* – Fr. Greg Boyle, Tattoos on the Heart

the program welcomed **82 participants** over the course of 3 days. The 2020 program also included an extra day for leadership, focused on issues specific to their ministry as congregational/province leaders. The Conference is already exploring ways to enhance the digital format of this program for future use.

2020 also saw the reinvigorated **Member Areas** hold several online programs to connect and engage those in different areas of the country. Patricia Chappell, SNDdeN and Anne-Louise Nadeau, SNDdeN offered those in the Mid-Atlantic Area (Washington DC/Baltimore) a session entitled *Breaking the Silence: Dialogue on Racism for Formators*. The New England Member Area (Boston) hosted Fr. Dan Horan, OFM for *Fear, Faith, and Religious Life in Context of Global Crisis*. These sessions provided important input for ongoing formation and allowed members to see each other and build virtual community regionally.

Moreover, the Conference was privileged to work with the Conrad H. Hilton Foundation on a new grant, **Forming the Next Generation of Religious & Resourcing Their Formators**. A significant part of 2020 was spent laying the groundwork for the two focus areas of the grant: (1) the establishment of an intercongregational collaborative novitiate in Chicago for the preparation of the next generation of religious and (2) the creation of a new and improved online, searchable resources platform for formators, leaders, and others interested in formation ministry and religious life. We are excited about the fruit this work will bear in the future,

including the opening of the novitiate in August, 2021.

While the new resource portal is being created, members continued to enjoy and make use of the numerous resources already available on our website. From archived webinars to recorded presentations to book reviews, **Conference resources** continue to grow and add value to best practices that inform both initial and ongoing formation.

Additionally, the ever-popular **InFormation**, the Conference’s quarterly bulletin, includes articles on a wide array of topics related to religious life and formation. In 2020 the publication explored such topics as hope and courage, discernment and decision-making, anti-racism, nuns and nones, Religious Life in the here and now and more. Book reviews and resource spotlights, also included in the bulletin, give members an overview of new and emerging sources meant to inform, broaden and deepen the formative journey.

Finally, the RFC saw several opportunities to provide **consultation services** for members and congregations in 2020. The Conference is currently engaged in an evaluation of a member community’s initial formation processes, for example, that has included a review team, site visits, surveys and other important metrics designed to give the community input, feedback, and best practices moving forward.





# together update

On August 17, 2020, then-President Father Mark Francis, CSV announced that Catholic Theological Union's Fall Term would be conducted online. In December of 2020, it was announced that the Spring, April, and Summer Terms would also be conducted online. Together needed to find a new way of being together — quickly!

The three participants swiftly acclimated to being "together" via Zoom. Once each week, Jane Aseltyne, IHM, from Michigan, Haerok Na, SC, from South Korea, and the newest member of the program, Nicole Varnerin, SND, from Ohio, "hung out" to form a supportive community. On Thursday evenings, Maribeth Howell, OP, the new coordinator of *Together*, joined the women. Since Thursday evenings at CTU have traditionally been identified as "formation evenings," the four women met regularly. On alternating Thursdays we would pray together and chat, or we would have an invited guest join us in conversation.

The wonderful women and men who joined us this year and their topics of discussion include:

- Discipleship in the Gospels (*Don Senior, CP*)
- Reflections on the Visitation (*Barbara Reid, OP*)
- Praying with the Psalms and Later Reflecting on the Annunciation (*Maribeth Howell, OP*)
- Dealing with Stress (*Mariane Fahlman, OP*)

- Introduction to Theological Reflection (*Joye Gros, OP*)
- The Woman at the Well (*Sandra Schneiders, IHM*)
- Theological Reflection and the Parables (*Christina Zaker, DMin*)
- Creation Spirituality and the Eucharist (*Linda Gibler, OP*)
- God's Presence in our Suffering (*Robin Ryan, CP*)

Soon, Haerok, our lovely sister from South Korea, will be returning to her homeland. While we will miss her dearly, we anticipate three new members to *Together for Fall 2021*. We are very excited and anticipate being "together" in Chicago in August. Alleluia!

To learn more about the *Together* Program, visit us at [together-formation.com](http://together-formation.com)



ABOVE: Maribeth Howell, OP, Together Program Coordinator

BELOW: Haerok Na, SC has enjoyed her time in the Together community this past year.



Sisters Jane, Haerok, Nicole and Maribeth have fun with guest presenter, Chrissy Zaker, DMin at one of their sessions last year.



# rfc membership

## The Membership of the Religious Formation Conference

In 2020, membership in the Conference remained around the 200 mark, that is, some 200 religious congregations either renewed or chose to join the Conference, with congregations of women religious comprising about 75 % of Conference membership. When a congregation, monastery, or a unit of a congregation such as a province or region joins the RFC, the Conference considers all its vowed members belong and enjoy the privileges of RFC membership. Congregations holding membership in the Religious Formation Conference, their leadership, formation personnel, and all their vowed members are the Conference's primary collaborators, as all work together toward the transformation of religious life for the sake of mission to the world today.

## Collaborating Groups and Organizations

1954 saw one of the first instances of significant collaboration among religious congregations in the United States, when a group of intrepid and visionary women religious came together to form the Sister Formation Conference, the SFC. In 1976, the SFC crossed a new threshold to welcome congregations of male religious to Conference membership, thus creating the Religious Formation Conference, the RFC. Today the Conference proudly carries forward this rich heritage.

Collaboration with other entities that serve consecrated life continues to be a priority for the Conference.

**We are privileged to be able to partner with a wide variety of organizations to better support the emerging new of religious life today. This concert of missions and charisms is placed at the service of initial and lifelong formation for women and men religious.**

- The Brothers Think Tank
- The Catholic Health Association (CHA)
- Catholic Sisters Week (CSW)
- Catholic Theological Union (CTU) and its Formation Council
- The Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)
- The Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL)
- Communicators for Women Religious (CWR)
- The Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) and its Formation Committee
- The Conrad H. Hilton Foundation
- The Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR)
- The GHR Foundation

- Giving Voice (GV)
- The Institute of Religious Formation (IRF)
- The Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and its Leadership Pathways Program
- The Leadership Collaborative
- The Mexican American Catholic College (MACC)
- The National Association of Vocation/Formation Directors (NAVFD; Canada)
- The National Conference of Vicars for Religious (NCVR)
- The National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO)
- The National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC)
- The Religious Brothers Conference (RBC)
- The Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI)
- The USCCB: Office of Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations



***“Resilience is very different than being numb. Resilience means you experience, you feel, you fail, you hurt. You fall. But, you keep going.”***

- Yasmin Mogahed





# *national board, staff & committees*

## **RFC Board**

Adriana Calzada, CCVI  
Maco Cassetta, CND  
Wayne Fitzpatrick, MM  
Nancy Gerth, SCN (Co-Chair)  
Richard Hall, OMI (Co-Chair)  
James B. Herring, O.Praem  
Mary Ann Nelson, OP (Secretary)  
Cyndi Nienhaus, CSA  
Anna Hang-Nga Nguyen, SCC  
Elyse Marie Ramirez, OP  
Carol Regan, SUSC  
Gregory Timothy Smyth, CFC  
Corrina Thomas, FSPA  
Mary R Walsh, CSJ (Treasurer)  
Ellen Dauwer, SC (ex officio)  
Ryan Hoffmann (staff)

## **RFC Staff**

Ellen Dauwer, SC  
Executive Director  
Ryan Hoffmann  
Associate Director  
Kathy Kandefer, BVM  
Operations Manager  
Connie Schoen, OP  
Program Director  
Karina Conrad, CDP (through 6/20)  
Together Program Coordinator  
Maribeth Howell, OP (since 8/20)  
Together Program Coordinator

## **Executive Committee**

Nancy Gerth, SCN (Co-Chair)  
Richard Hall, OMI (Co-Chair)  
Mary Ann Nelson, OP (Secretary)  
Mary R Walsh, CSJ (Treasurer)  
Ellen Dauwer, SC (ex officio)

## **Finance Committee**

Wayne Fitzpatrick, MM  
Carol Regan, SUSC  
Mary Walsh, CSJ (Chair)  
Ellen Dauwer, SC (ex officio)  
Ryan Hoffmann (ex officio)  
Katherine Kandefer, BVM (staff)

## **Non-board members**

James Gaffney, FSC  
Leora Linnenkugel, OLVM  
Dorothy Pagosa, SSJ-TOSF  
Reneta Webb

## **Mary Emil Penet Award Committee**

Corrina Thomas, FSPA

## **Non-board members**

Mary Glackin, IHM

## **Board Governance Committee**

Maco Cassetta, CND (Chair)  
James Herring, O.Praem.  
Anna Hang-Nga Nguyen, SCC  
Ellen Dauwer, SC (ex officio)

## **Congress Planning Committee**

Nancy Gerth, SCN  
Mary Ann Nelson, OP  
Elyse Marie Ramirez, OP (Co-Chair)  
Lori Ritz (Associate)  
Corrina Thomas, FSPA  
Adriana Calzada Vazquez, CCVI  
Ellen Dauwer, SC (staff)  
Ryan Hoffmann (Co-Chair)  
Kathy Kandefer, BVM (staff)

## **Investment Committee**

Michaela Huelbig  
Christopher Strub Kelly  
John M. Williams (Chair)  
Kevin Keating (Investment Manager)

## **Membership Committee**

Elyse Marie Ramirez, OP (Chair)  
Gregory Timothy Smyth, CFC  
Ryan Hoffmann (ex officio)

## **Non-board members**

Helena Adaku Ogbuji, CCVI  
Dina Bato, SP  
Greg Evers, CPPS

## **Succession Planning Committee**

James Herring, O.Praem.  
Carol Regan, SUSC  
Gregory Timothy Smyth, CFC

## **Strategic Planning Committee**

Wayne Fitzpatrick, MM  
Nancy Gerth, SCN  
Richard Hall, OMI  
Corrina Thomas, FSPA  
Ellen Dauwer, SC (ex officio)  
Ryan Hoffmann (staff)  
Sue Weber (consultant)

*“Like tiny seeds with potent power to push through tough ground and become mighty trees, we hold innate reserves of unimaginable strength. We are **resilient.**”* - Catherine DeVrye, The Gift of Nature



## congregation & organization contributions

Significant financial support for the RFC comes from the membership dues paid by our primary collaborators in mission, those religious congregations, provinces, and other units belonging to the Conference. Many of them choose to assist the Conference in other ways as well: through financial donations, membership on the RFC Board, on standing or ad hoc committees, and the provision of in-kind, voluntary service to the Conference. In this they are joined by foundations, vendors, and others who support the mission of the Conference.

**The Conference is extremely grateful to our benefactors for all the ways they support our mission and enable our work.**

If we have inadvertently omitted a benefactor, please alert us to this error so that it can be corrected in the next Annual Report.

Congregation of Divine Providence – San Antonio  
Congregation of St. Agnes  
Congregation of the Humility of Mary  
Franciscan Sisters of Mary  
Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration  
GHR Foundation  
Hilton Foundation  
Holy Union Sisters  
Hospital Sisters of St. Francis  
Hospitaller Order of St. John of God  
Marist Brothers  
Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers  
Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters  
Paulist Fathers  
Racine Dominicans

Religious of the Cenacle  
Religious of the Sacred Heart of Jesus  
Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters  
Sisters of Charity BVM  
Sisters of Charity Halifax  
Sisters of Charity of Nazareth  
Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth  
Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word – Houston  
Sisters of Providence  
Sisters of St Francis of the Congregation of Our Lady of Lourdes  
Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange  
Sisters of the Presentation – Dubuque  
Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament

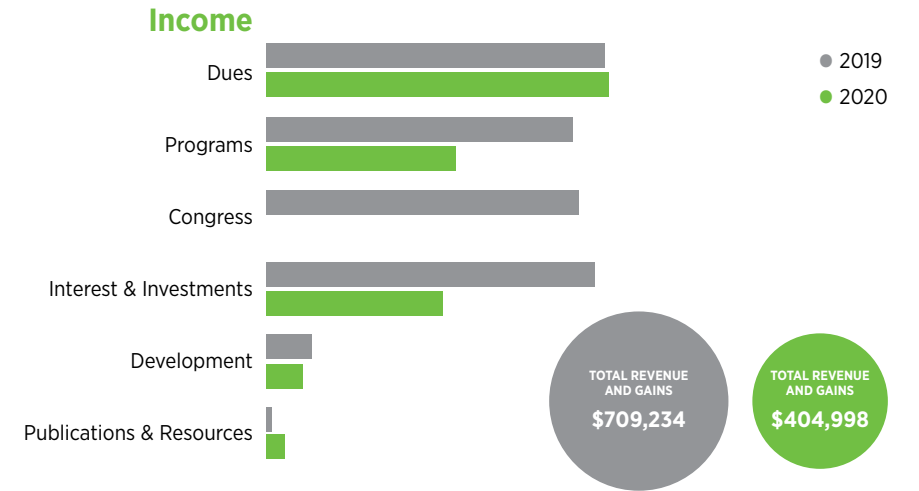




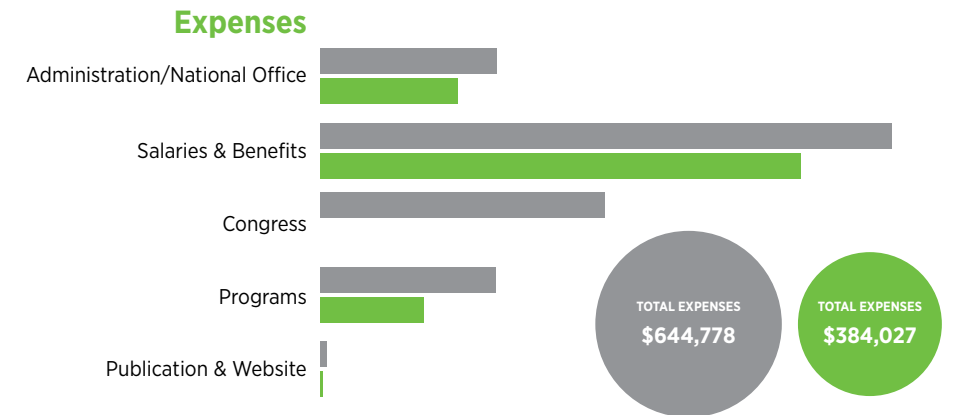


# finances

Income	2019	2020
Dues	\$179,544	\$181,569
Programs	\$162,805	\$100,563
Congress	\$165,584	-
Interest and Investments	\$174,298	\$93,886
Development	\$24,075	\$19,110
Publications and Resources	\$2,928	\$9,870
<b>Total Revenue and Gains</b>	<b>\$709,234</b>	<b>\$404,998</b>



Expenses	2019	2020
Administration/National Office	\$93,852	\$72,753
Salaries and Benefits	\$303,488	\$254,843
Congress	\$150,868	-
Programs	\$93,368	\$54,926
Publication and Website	\$3,202	\$1,505
<b>Total Expenses</b>	<b>\$644,778</b>	<b>\$384,027</b>
<b>Net Income</b>	<b>\$64,456</b>	<b>\$20,971</b>










# ReligiousFormation CONFERENCE




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