
Client Story: Planning with a Religious Community of Women

The Situation

A religious community of women facing a diminishing number of sisters (fewer than 60) came to The Reid Group looking for assistance in being pro-active about its future and finding ways for the community to “move forward together.”

The Challenges

The community faced a number of challenges as they looked to the future:

- The rising cost of health care, particularly with sisters requiring skilled nursing and assisted living support.
- Maintaining the bonds within the community when the primary residence for the sisters—the motherhouse—would be sold to a local university.
- Securing the legacy of the community through strategic fund investment so that the future needs of the sisters would be met.
- Addressing the unique needs of the sisters’ living situations, with some wanting independent living and others needing more support along a continuum of care.
- Being able to think, plan, vision together so that the experience of unity in the community would be deepened even in the midst of a “Diaspora” experience.
- Where to hold important community events—jubilees, feast days, anniversaries, funerals—and ensure that these are still occasions of joy and meaning without the motherhouse.

The Reid Group Solution

Based on The Reid Group’s experience with religious communities of women and men, we offered the following:

1. **Community interviews.** We trained a team of sisters to interview each member of the community about what attracted them to the community, why they were proud to be a member, their hopes, dreams and concerns about the future. In this way, every sister physically able to participate made a contribution to a positive solution.
2. **Reflecting on their history.** We facilitated conversations in which the sisters reflected together on their 100-year history. In these conversations, the sisters could “brag” about their grace-filled successes in making a difference in the lives of the people they served.

3. **Identifying resources and needs.** We encouraged the sisters to identify the gifts they bring currently to help the community move forward together, as well as what they need from the community.
4. **Develop a plan.** We helped the community develop a plan, inclusive of everyone, that described what a positive, life-giving future would look like for all members of the community. Through the process of fleshing out this future, the sisters gained confidence that they would be loved and cared for in their new environment.

Outcomes

As a result of its careful and thorough participation in the futuring process, this religious community of women experienced a number of positive outcomes:

- Properties owned by the community were sold for several million dollars.
- With the sale of the properties, the community established an endowment to support future community members who want to serve “the least among us.”
- All of the sisters were relocated to comfortable and appropriate facilities that meet their needs and that they helped to choose.
- A plan for the location of celebrations of milestones was developed and approved by the community members.
- Every sister was paired with a “buddy” in the community.
- The sisters say that the spirit of the community is stronger than ever before, that they communicate with each other more clearly and that every member of the community feels ownership of their future.