**RESULTS**

# Support for Sister-Affiliated Ministries During Challenging Times: Understanding a Foundation Initiative in Two Regions

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## Key Points

· This article describes the efforts of two foundations to sustain the ministries of Catholic sisters in two regions: northeast Ohio and South Carolina.

· Spanning more than 10 years, the initiative has drawn on multiple strategies – including convening, grantmaking, communicating, and research – in partnership with sisters themselves to sustain a diverse set of ministries.

· The work informs foundation practice by illuminating an approach to capacity development in very different regional contexts.

· Key lessons include being sensitive to the context, paying attention to both individual and organizational capacity, and the need for data.

## Introduction

Catholic sisters have established schools, hospitals, and social service ministries that have served hundreds of thousands of people over the past 200 years (Leadership Conference for Women Religious, 2010). Due to the natural aging of Catholic sisters and a decline in new vocations, however, there is an accelerating loss of sisters and their ministries nationwide (Gautier & Cidade, 2010). Although this loss is itself a concern, a more important impact is experienced by beneficiaries of ministries, especially those who have few alternatives to sister-affiliated social services. Because these ministries fill an important gap in the social safety net for vulnerable populations, the disappearance of ministry-directed efforts has begun to draw the attention of foundations (Wittberg, 2000).

In 2001 the Saint Ann Foundation (now the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland) conducted a research study on the ministries of women religious across Kentucky, Tennessee, and South Carolina and identified three challenges facing the sisters and their ministries: (1) an aging and declining number of sisters in ministry; (2) an increase in the underlying needs the ministries were addressing; and (3) the paucity of plans in place for transitioning ministry leadership or sustaining ministry services (Csank, 2002). To address these challenges the foundation embarked upon a Collaboration for Ministry Initiative (CMI), with a goal of building collaborative capacity within and among ministries by providing grants, training and technical assistance, and opportunities for networking. Over time, the Cleveland initiative narrowed to focus on northeast Ohio.

In 2003 the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina conducted a study of Catholic sisters in that state and reached similar conclusions regarding fewer sisters, their imperiled ministries, and the need for collaborative capacity building (Csank, 2004). In 2004 the CMI expanded to South Carolina and efforts began across both regions to build the collaborative capacity of sister-affiliated ministries in an effort to sustain the positive impact on beneficiaries.

## Capacity-Building Context

The notion of building capacity within and in support of sisters' ministries links closely to the broader domain of capacity building in the nonprofit sector. Nonprofit capacity building has been the focus of extensive study, and numerous definitions have been offered for capacity building in the literature (Light, 2004). McPhee and Bare (2001) define capacity building as "the ability of nonprofit organizations to fulfill their missions in an effective manner." Grønbjerg and Cheney (2007) note seven operationalized dimensions of capacity building articulated in the literature: financial resources, marketing, networking and advocacy, information technology, human resources, planning and programs, and operations and governance. At its core, capacity building essentially involves the ability "to secure outside resources and to attain scale" (Glickman & Servon, 1998, p. 502).

In terms of strategies to address capacity building, De Vita, Fleming, and Twombly (2001) propose three main types of activities: 1) assessment inside and outside of the organization; 2) interventions using management consultation, training, and/or technical assistance; and 3) direct financial support for core operating support, specific grants, and working capital. Yet others have suggested that capacity building should go beyond finding ways to increase nonprofits' financial-resource base to include such things as developing a broad vision and assessing how the organization can meet the community's needs (Boris, 2001). Overall, the nonprofit capacity-building literature provides good conceptual definitions and some guidance on identifying strategies and models for building nonprofit capacity (Fischer, 2004).

Particularly relevant to the work of sisters, substantial investments were made in the capacity of faith-based organizations through the George W. Bush-era Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Its goal was to increase the participation of these entities in federally funded health and human services (Executive Office of the President, 2008). Evidence suggests that because of their limited size and relative inexperience with the management of programming, many faith-based organizations need specific assistance to

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develop capacity to manage their programs. The recognition of that need has resulted in the funding of intermediary organizations to help build the capacity of these entities (Sherman, 2004). For example, of money initially appropriated through the office's Compassion Capital Fund, $25 million (83 percent) was for intermediary organizations to aid in "building capacity among faith-based organizations (FBOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs), with the ultimate aim of enhancing social services for Americans in need." (Sherman, 2004, p. 73). As the underlying capacity of faith-based organizations has become better understood, there has been better planning to address their capacity-related needs (Clerkin & Grønbjerg, 2007; Sanyal, 2006).

The CMI developed as a type of intermediary strategy. The existing literature maps well on to the current study inasmuch as a substantial share of sister-sponsored ministries operate as small and grassroots initiatives, either with distinct nonprofit status or adjunct to a nonprofit. The scale and sustainability of these ministries is often hampered by the limitations that capacity-building strategies are intended to address, such as fund-raising and communications.

**Table 1** Regional Context for Initiative

|  | Diocese of Charleston (S.C.) | Diocese of Cleveland (Ohio) |
|---|---|---|
| Total population | 4.72 million | 2.78 million |
| Size (square miles) | 31,111 | 3,414 |
| Context | 46 counties, primarily rural | 8 counties, primarily urban |
| Catholic population | 195,368 (4%) | 710,000 (27%) |
| Catholic sisters in region | 123 | 1,035 |
| Density – Sisters per 1,000 square miles | 4 | 303 |
| Congregational motherhouses in region | 2 | 12 |
| Type of ministries | Missionary territory | Many parish-related ministries |

Note: The Diocese of Cleveland is comprised of eight counties in northeastern Ohio: Cuyahoga, Summit, Lorain, Lake, Geauga, Medina, Wayne, and Ashland.

## One Initiative, Two Regions

The Collaboration for Ministry Initiative comprises two parallel initiatives undertaken by the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland and the Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina. Both foundation ministries were founded by the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine, under the Sisters of Charity Health System, with a specific mission to address and alleviate poverty. Although the CMI is carried out in northeast Ohio and South Carolina, cultural and demographic differences between these locations led to the tailoring of some of the strategies and the outcomes of the initiative to best match those regional realities. (See Table 1.)

South Carolina has a population of approximately 4.7 million and is predominately Protestant. Because of a small Catholic presence (4 percent), the state is still viewed as missionary territory. Historically, the majority of Catholic sisters who work in South Carolina come from orders and motherhouses located outside the state, and this trend continues; there are only two motherhouses in South Carolina today. The first, the Sisters of Charity of Our Lady of Mercy (OLM), was founded in Charleston in 1829 and was one of

the first eight permanent congregations founded in the United States. Initially concerned with the education of children and orphans in South Carolina, the congregation broadened its mission to the economically disadvantaged and started missions in Georgia and North Carolina. In contrast to the community mission of OLM, the second motherhouse in South Carolina belongs to the Order of St. Clare, known as the Poor Clares. Established in Greenville in 1955, the Poor Clares serve the Diocese of Charleston through contemplative prayer, not direct ministry.

The missionary nature of South Carolina has led to many small-scale ministries, staffed with a few sisters living in mostly rural parts of the state. As of 2011, there were approximately 123 sisters active in ministry in 32 of South Carolina's 46 counties. True to the missionary purpose of their presence, the sisters come from around the country and represent 25 orders.

In contrast to South Carolina, Ohio has nearly 11.5 million people and a sizable Catholic population. In northeast Ohio's eight-county diocese surrounding Cleveland, fully 27 percent of its 2.8 million residents are active Catholics and a

substantial number of residents are "fallen away" Catholics (Catholic Diocese of Cleveland, 2010). Since the arrival in 1850 of the Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland, more than 150 congregations have had some kind of presence in northeast Ohio. The Ursuline Sisters were followed one year later by what would become the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine (the founders of the Sisters of Charity Foundations of both Cleveland and South Carolina). Even with many mergers over the past decade, there remain more than a dozen motherhouses or regional houses within the Dioceses of Cleveland and Youngstown.

The stronger presence of Catholics in northeast Ohio translates into many large parishes and a corresponding higher number of parish-related ministries (e.g., religious education, pastoral care, etc.). While parish-based ministries serve many Catholics, the larger inventory of ministries where sisters are involved serve Catholics and non-Catholics. Services focus on the poor: in schools in the urban cores of Cleveland and Akron and on health care, social services, and advocacy. The CMI has paid particular attention to strengthening and sustaining ministries in the wake of a significant parish consolidation in the Diocese of Cleveland in 2009-2010. Fewer churches have led to more sisters being involved in ministries to the poor that are not based at a specific parish.

The ministries undertaken by sisters are diverse and span the spectrum of social, educational, and human-service domains. Survey data from Ohio revealed that sisters were most often in engaged in preschool to post-secondary education (42 percent); religious education (16 percent); social services (10 percent); and hospice and health care (6 percent), with the balance involved in such ministries as counseling, family services, and adult education. Half of the sisters are in ministries with fewer than eight paid staff.

Many sisters work collaboratively in their ministries; 72 percent of Ohio sisters reported being engaged in collaboration of some kind. Collaboration reflects such activities as information sharing, client referrals, and cooperative planning as well as more substantive collaboration through

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joint programs or shared staffing. Nearly half of Ohio sisters' ministries were engaged with sisters from other orders (45 percent) and with diocesan organizations (48 percent). Many were also collaborating with nonprofit or government organizations (41 percent) and faith-based organizations (34 percent). Individual sisters undertake ministries with approval and, often, support from their religious order. Orders may also directly sponsor ministries (e.g, through operation of a school, a hospital, or an assisted-living center) in which their sisters serve. These arrangements stem from the historical mission of each religious order, as well as the social context in which they serve and the relative strengths of the programs of the Catholic Church in that area (e.g., through Catholic Charities and other diocesan-sponsored efforts).

## Methods

The objective of this study is to document a 10-year initiative undertaken by two foundations and how it progressed. The assessment included a review of all existing records created as part of the initiative. The primary data sources are (1) foundation reports on the initiative, as well as external reports and published articles on the initiative; (2) records of grantmaking related to the work of women religious in the two regions; (3) survey and focus group data from sisters in Ohio and transcripts from interviews with sisters in South Carolina; and (4) consultation with the

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foundation staff and program officers in South Carolina and Ohio. The approach relied on case study methods (Yin, 2003) by drawing on a mix of qualitative and quantitative data. A cross-case methodology was used to examine areas of convergence between the two distinctly different regions where the initiative took place. This allowed for the examination of areas of similarity and difference in regard to how the initiative was adapted to the local context in each case. The authors worked independently in identifying the patterns within each region first, and then worked collaboratively to synthesize the learning across the two regions.

### Key Insights and Principled Approach

As the CMI unfolded in the two regions, a fundamental conclusion reached early in the initiative was that it was impossible to separate the everyday activities of a sister from the multiple ministries in which she was engaged.[1] In essence, the sister was the ministry. The social capital present among Catholic sisters and between them and the people to whom they minister have been shown to be crucial resources in effecting community change on issues of social justice (Karraker, 2011).

This insight had important implications for how to develop the initiative. While a focus on enhancing the capacity of sisters to strengthen their ability to continue ministering would be necessary, a simultaneous need existed to strengthen the ministries themselves. To accomplish these dual purposes, designing an initiative to be both sister-focused and ministry-supportive would require input from the sisters. Thus, the initiative became guided by three principles in decision-making: All decisions were to be data-driven, sister-focused, and ministry-supportive.

### Strategies

Over the decade-long course of the initiative, several strategies were undertaken to support and sustain sister-affiliated ministries addressing poverty in South Carolina and northeast Ohio. Common strategies in both states originated in response to a perceived need, though the nature and importance of each strategy varied depending on the time and place of implementation.[2] At times, more efforts were directed at providing organizational support to ministries and at times more support was aimed at sisters. Common strategies included convening the sisters, financially supporting ministries through grants, creating new means of communication among sisters, documenting the importance of the ministerial work that was being done to address poverty to others, and collecting data and evaluating the initiative's efforts.

### Convening

In South Carolina, convening sisters has taken the form of regional workshops and annual conferences. Regional workshops originally were conducted to accomplish one of two purposes: ministry capacity-building or spiritual renewal.

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[1] In the first survey conducted of sisters in South Carolina, sisters reported being involved in an average of four ministries (Small, Csank, Ott, & Wills, 2007). In Ohio, sisters reported an average of three ministries, with 38 percent being involved in three or more ministries (Fischer & Bartholomew, 2012).

[2] In Ohio, the original purpose statement of the CMI committed the Saint Ann Foundation to "(1) provide targeted funding to support both the enhancement of existing collaborative ministries and the development of new collaborative ministries, including funding for necessary planning processes; (2) provide educational opportunities, resources and technical assistance in the key areas of collaboration and strategic planning; and (3) work to create a network of additional support among providers and other stakeholders." In South Carolina, early needs assessments demonstrated a similar desire by sisters for opportunities to meet for spiritual renewal, collaboration, and ministerial capacity-building (Small, Csank, Ott & Wills, 2007).

In order to target sisters working in a particular region of South Carolina, workshops were held in various locations around the state to allow for convenient travel and to foster participation. For example, regional meetings have been held at the monastery of the Poor Clares of Greenville, the Springbank spiritual retreat center run by sisters in Kingstree, and the offices of the Diocese of Charleston. In addition, regional workshops to build and enhance the capacity of ministries have been held across the state on topics such as social marketing of nonprofit organizations, grant writing, and fundraising.

Since 2005 eight statewide annual conferences for sisters have also been held in South Carolina. In contrast to the smaller regional workshops, the overall purpose of the annual conference has been to provide an opportunity for all sisters across the state to meet for spiritual renewal and ministry capacity building. Because of the sisters' lack of familiarity with one another and their respective ministries, the conferences initially focused on establishing relationships among the sisters and creating a collective identity as "South Carolina Sisters" with a common bond of working in the perplexing and poverty-stricken context of the state. As sisters became more familiar with one another (and South Carolina), more recent conferences expanded to include Mass and an annual address by the bishop that provided him with the opportunity to speak to an assembly of the sisters and discuss statewide priorities.

In Ohio, given the already extensive nature and extent of Catholic presence, there was less need to provide opportunities for sisters to meet one another or gather for emotional support. Still, there was a need to increase opportunities for education and networking around issues related to sustaining ministries and collaborating more effectively to serve the poor. Accordingly, educational programs held from 2002 to 2008 included sessions focused on the use of appreciative inquiry, the development of collaboration, and leadership transition. These conferences invited sisters from Region VI of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (Ohio, Kentucky, and Tennessee), as well as South Carolina. In 2007,

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the education focus expanded to capacity building for ministries (e.g., fund development); the next year the focus shifted to service to the homeless and very poor.

From 2008 to 2012, however, attention turned from educational sessions to a larger effort to build awareness of the work of women religious in the region. The Diocese of Cleveland's parish-consolidation effort raised concerns among the sisters that ministry efforts and outreach to people in need could be lost in the clustering process. Fortunately, the initiative had taken a first step in identifying ministries through a 2006 "mapping project" that used appreciative inquiry to spark collaborative ministry activities.

The most significant step for collaboration was the organic development – by the sisters them-

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selves – of Women With Spirit … NOW, a committee of more than 25 sisters that began to meet as an inspiring national exhibit, *Women & Spirit: Catholic Sisters in America*, concluded its visit in Cleveland. The goal was to re-energize older sisters and educate younger sisters and lay people about how they could collaborate for ministry to meet the needs around them. In April 2011, the committee convened more than 200 sisters to reconnect and explore issues of interest. Working groups followed to form new ministries – a Catholic presence in an impoverished neighborhood and a leadership development program for new ministry leaders - and enhance existing collaborations.

### Grantmaking

Each of the foundations adopted strategies for providing funding directly to the work of women religious. These grants were most often awarded either to the religious order sponsoring the ministry or to the stand-alone nonprofit ministry itself. In South Carolina, special funding has been available from the onset of the initiative for sister-affiliated ministries to plan and implement collaborative and capacity-building activities. The original intent for funding was to promote the sustainability of ministries should a sister no longer be present in the ministry. Overall, 52 grants totaling more than $500,000 were distributed for implementation grants (n = 30), planning grants (n = 15), and direct-service grants (n = 6), as well as one invited grant. In order to build capacity of grant recipients in South Carolina, grantees were initially visited by a sister or a team of two sisters to provide training or technical assistance that

might aid in the implementation of the grant as well as to share input with the foundation staff to better understand how the poor might best be served. As the initiative evolved, later site visits have been conducted directly by the foundation's staff and members of the foundation board.

In northeast Ohio from 2002-2007, 24 grants were awarded to 15 organizations. The collaborative nature of the grant requirements ultimately involved 41 congregations of women religious from three states. Later, from 2008-2012, there were approximately 13 grants made to seven collaborations. In addition, nine grants were made to collaborations within the Sisters of Charity Health System (three grantees).[3]

### Communicating

In South Carolina, creating a communication structure that allowed sisters scattered across the state to feel more connected was seen as critical to building a collective sense of identity as well as a means for sisters to learn about one another. A Collaboration for Ministry newsletter was launched in 2005 to focus on CMI activities and is now published twice a year. A directory of 120 sisters that includes a description of their ministries was updated in 2011 and is now available online.

In addition to establishing communication among sisters, efforts were made to share the presence and impact of sister-affiliated ministries with a broader audience. The Catholic Miscellany, the newspaper of the Diocese of Charleston, was contacted in 2006 and began a series of articles on sisters and their ministries. A reporter for the newspaper, which covers the entire state, now regularly attends the annual conference and Catholic readers across the state are kept informed of the sisters' work. A book of reflections by the sisters, *Eruptions of Amazement*, was published and distributed, and the foundation website now highlights sisters and their work and features information related to Collaboration for Ministry grants and events.

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[3] The Religious Communities focus area also conducted a program for women religious in northeast Ohio called the Saint Ann Legacy program. It made direct service grants to 25 grantees, which were not necessarily "collaborative" grantees, for five years.

In 2006, a plan was conceived to produce a documentary film that would preserve some of the efforts of sisters and their ministries in South Carolina. With initial input from an advisory council of sisters, a decision was made to highlight the unique contributions of sisters in addressing the needs of the poor while simultaneously acknowledging the decline of sister-affiliated ministries and their uncertain future. *Crossroads*, a 27-minute film, premiered on South Carolina Education Public Television in 2008 and earned several awards. It has sparked much discussion and reflection among sisters on the meaning and often difficult reality of the decline of sister-affiliated ministries.

In Ohio, the chief communication effort was to bring attention to the impact of sister-affiliated ministries. In a bold move, the CMI in Cleveland led a collaborative effort to bring the *Women & Spirit* exhibit, organized by the Leadership Conference of Women Religious, to the Maltz Museum of Jewish Heritage in Ohio in 2010. The exhibit had close to 20,000 visitors, including a contingent of sisters who traveled from South Carolina, and brought widespread attention to sisters' ministries.

The experience of hosting a national exhibit also led to the development of an adjoining exhibit about sisters from northeast Ohio: *Progress & Promise: Sisters Serving Northeast Ohio* continued as a stand-alone exhibit, touring parishes, universities, the Cleveland Public Library, motherhouses, and nursing facilities from 2010-2012. The initiative also produced a companion book that expands on the exhibit to discuss the historical and contemporary ministries of women religious, including new vocations and associates, spiritual ministries, and art and music. The book has been disseminated to religious congregations, news media, public officials, Catholic colleges, school principals, and other foundations (approximately 1,500 copies distributed through 2012). Beginning in the fall of 2012, a professor and graduate students at Ursuline College led "local conversations" at parishes and ministries about *Progress & Promise* themes, marking the 50th anniversary of Vatican II.

More conventionally, the CMI in Cleveland began a newsletter in 2012 called *Insights*. In addition to news about sisters, the first issue announced recent grants and grant opportunities and described current grantees, other funders that have made grants to sisters, current research, and efforts to build awareness about sisters.

## Data Collection and Evaluation

Data collection in South Carolina has primarily been directed at understanding the nature and extent of sister-affiliated ministries. Statewide surveys were conducted in 2006 (Small et al., 2007) and 2008 (Small & Csank, 2009) to determine the number of sisters in South Carolina, the type and location of ministries, and whether there were plans for sustainability. Qualitative interviews also have been held to gather more detailed information about how ministries might be supported in their current form or sustained when sisters are no longer affiliated with the project.[4]

In South Carolina, evaluation of these strategies has taken place (Small, 2009). Participants are routinely asked their opinions on the usefulness of convening, communication strategies, and trainings and technical assistance provided by the initiative. The results of the evaluations are regularly reviewed and influence CMI activities. As a result of an evaluation of early rounds of grantmaking, for example, more assistance was directed to grant writing and fundraising. In response to early evaluations of conferences, more time is now allocated to interaction among sisters.

In northeast Ohio, a key focus of the documentation was applied research. Two studies have been completed. In one, "Women Religious in a Changing Urban Landscape" (2009-2010), information was collected from 164 Catholic sisters from 15 religious orders. The findings illuminated the characteristics of sisters' ministries and how proactive and collaborative efforts can enhance the likelihood of effectively addressing ongoing community needs. Two data-collection strategies were part of this work: an inventory of the

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[4] According to past research, the average age of sisters active in ministry in South Carolina is 67.

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and fewer resources, and as they seek to develop new leaders. For example, frequently mentioned in the focus groups was the theme of "charism" as shaping ministry, the charism having been part of the order, in some expression, since its founding centuries ago (Fischer & Murphy, 2013). The charism expresses the particular purpose or mission of the congregation, as well as its preferred form of ministry. The charism usually relates to the circumstances out of which the congregation arose, and to the person or group who founded it. For example, Franciscans are characterized by their love for the poor modeled by St. Francis of Assisi, while Dominicans have a commitment to the ministry of preaching and teaching modeled by St. Dominic.

## Achievements

The evolving initiative in northeast Ohio and South Carolina has produced both expected and unexpected outcomes, all of which contribute to a more sophisticated understanding of how best to strengthen and sustain ministries. The principal achievements of the CMI are:

1. creating and enhancing the collective identity of sisters,

2. raising the profile of sister-affiliated ministries,

3. building and enriching the capacity of sisters in ministry,

4. building organizational support for ministries,

5. creating ministries,

6. transforming ministries, and perhaps most importantly,

7. the eventual perception of CMI itself as a ministry.

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assignments and ministries of women religious to assess the sisters' geographic dispersion and a survey of approximately 300 women religious in active ministry in the Cleveland region about the nature of their work and the impact of forthcoming parish closures. This research sought to be relevant to women religious and others looking for effective responses to shifting community realities (Fischer & Bartholomew, 2012), and in particular informed thinking about how sisters' ministries related to the impact of parish consolidation.

Another study, "Harvest of Ministry: Exploring the Ministry of Women Religious in Cleveland," described the unique approach of women religious and the underlying forces that shape their approach. The study drew on six focus group conversations involving 33 Catholic sisters and identified themes that frame a better understanding of the work of today's women religious. Consideration of the themes can especially benefit faith-based agencies as they adapt to increasing needs

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## Conclusions

The lessons learned from CMI are offered here in the spirit of helping those with similar ambitions to strengthen and sustain not only sister-affiliated ministries, but also any grassroots programming that may be in jeopardy. Though the general framework of capacity building offers much guidance for the organizing and fielding of such strategies, this case demonstrates the value of doing this in partnership with those we aim to assist. The initiative offers at least five core lessons that were identified in the success of the initiative:

- *The role of neutrality.* The Sisters of Charity Foundation of South Carolina plays a neutral role, independent of the diocese and pre-existing religious organizations in South Carolina. The Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland also played a neutral role in supporting the work of women religious both within and outside the parish framework. With this neutral approach, the CMI has been able to nurture a growing movement for sisters to examine issues beyond their particular religious order, as sisters with both a common Gospel-based mission and a specific geographical identity.

- *The need for data.* Both foundations conducted a needs assessment, which documented and created a common understanding of sisters and their ministries. Over the years, sisters have demanded authentic data that is accurate and credible but that also reflects the lived experiences of the people they serve. To this end, data play a key role not only in undertaking capacity building but also in staying focused on what the capacity is being created for – that is, more effective meeting of the community needs.

- *A team approach.* The CMI has been always been guided by a foundation-led committee with key input from sisters themselves. As stated by the founder of the initiative,

Essential to the integrity of the Collaboration for Ministry Initiative's culture and spirit is a deep respect and genuine appreciation for women religious and their remarkable works of ministry. Both staff and consultants are committed to continue to elicit their feedback in order to better understand emerging needs and provide appropriate responses (Csank, 2012).

This underscores the need to undertake capacity building in partnership with the intended beneficiaries.

- *Both sister-focused and ministry-focused.* At times, CMI support has been geared to the individual sister (e.g., networking opportunities), and at other times to that ministry that may be run by sisters and lay staff together (e.g., a grant to an order or organization). This dual focus maintains a commitment to women religious and the contexts in which they have chosen to serve. In many nonprofit contexts, the attention to the individual (e.g., a nonprofit leader or innovator) and the organization is crucial and implies multilevel strategies to impact capacity.

- *Adapting to the environment.* The initiative's priorities have necessarily shifted over time based on the regional challenges and opportunities that have presented themselves in South Carolina and northeast Ohio. As a result, capacity building has not been a static undertaking; rather, it has been used as a way to leverage emerging opportunities. In this way, CMI has remained responsive and relevant to the lived experiences of sisters in ministry.

With the multiple achievements of the CMI in northeast Ohio and South Carolina, the primary concern remains: The ministry-related work done by Catholic sisters is destined to change as fewer and fewer sisters remain to carry out the work. Only through conscious efforts to sustain the underlying mission through whatever services are needed will disadvantaged communities continue to be served by sisters' legacies. Though the challenge remains and grows ever more urgent, efforts to extend the impact of sisters' work through new structures and approaches hold great promise.

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