News
Religious Life
Social Justice



A volunteer from Forgotten Harvest food bank in Warren, Michigan, sorts jars of peanut butter during a mobile food pantry distribution Dec. 21, 2020. (CNS/Reuters/Emily Elconin)



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Because the global pandemic has made most in-person events impossible, organizers of Catholic Sisters Week were struggling to come up with ideas on how to observe the annual celebration of women religious.

At the same time, members of the Leadership Conference of Women Religious' Region IV were discussing food insecurity, how it has grown dramatically during the pandemic, and how donors often give generously only during the holidays while the need continues year-round.

"Once the holidays are over, the food insecurity is still there," said Sr. Linda Romey, a Benedictine Sister of Erie, Pennsylvania, and the congregation's coordinator of communications and development. Romey also chairs the Communicators for Women Religious task force that organizes Catholic Sisters Week.

"We were looking for a way we could do some kind of campaign on a large scale and maybe challenge the other LCWR regions," she said. "And we thought Catholic Sisters Week might be the perfect way to do that."



The Catholic Sisters Week logo (Courtesy of Catholic Sisters Week)

So Region IV, which encompasses several states along the East Coast, challenged the other 14 regions to do something to address food insecurity: host a food drive, volunteer at a food bank or pantry, set up a community garden or pantry, or advocate for policies to increase access to food. And if those activities could be

integrated into Catholic Sisters Week, all the better.

Catholic Sisters Week, now in its eighth year, always begins March 8, International Women's Day, and runs through March 14. This is the second year the event has been organized by Communicators for Women Religious, a professional organization of personnel responsible for communications within Catholic religious congregations of women.

The other LCWR regions rose to the challenge, and at last count, Romey said, more than 80 communities will participate in the food drive in various ways, including onsite food drop-offs and virtual events in which donors are encouraged to make online financial donations.

"The thing that really excited me is we've been trying to shift the focus of Catholic Sisters Week so we're not just commending sisters for the work they've accomplished, we're looking at the broader impact of sisters over the centuries," Romey said.

Sisters were the cornerstone in building Catholic education in the United States, but those efforts also shaped leaders in both civil life and faith life and had a profound effect on society, she added.

"And today, the work of sisters isn't done just by sisters anymore," Romey said. "So we're celebrating the wisdom traditions that are lived by such a broad range of people. It's all of us together."

In addition to the dozens of events listed on the Catholic Sisters Week website, the Given Institute will kick off its Catholic Sisters Week activities with a panel on Catholic women's leadership that will include Felician Sr. Desiré Anne-Marie Findlay, vocation outreach minister for the Felician Sisters of North America's Our Lady of Hope Province.

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Other non-food-related events include "This Is Our Story ... This Is Our Song: Black Catholic Women Religious Standing in the Breach," an online event hosted by Network, a Catholic social justice lobby, and featuring Sr. Anita Baird of the Daughters of the Heart of Mary.

"Exploring Intersections: Catholic Sisters on Racism, Migration and Climate" will be the first of a yearlong monthly series by LCWR Region X. The first session, March 10, is on gender equity.

The Center for the Study of Consecrated Life at Chicago's Catholic Theological Union, Communicators for Women Religious, the Institute of Religious Formation at Catholic Theological Union, Giving Voice, the National Religious Vocation Conference, and the Religious Formation Conference are teaming up to present an evening of prayer celebrating women religious. The event will feature Mercy Sr. Mary Haddad, president and CEO of the Catholic Health Association; Apostles of the Sacred Heart of Jesus vocation director Sr. Colleen Mattingly; and Sr. Romina Sapinoso, a Sister of Charity of Cincinnati who specializes in multicultural education.

In addition to an event to make cards for isolated sisters, the Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration are also joining the food insecurity challenge and will use $55,000 from the 2017 sale of their hospital in La Crosse, Wisconsin, toward a network of community gardens.

Romey said all of the events planned are wonderful, but because the food challenge reaches beyond just sisters, it demonstrates the solidarity between women religious and the laity.

"It's pulling everyone together," she said.