



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

Animated by God's vivifying presence, the RFC will stand at the forefront of discerning the formative horizon of the emergent in religious life. In concert with members and collaborative partners, the Conference will lead in the areas of initial and ongoing formation and the professional preparation of formators.

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Two years ago, as the Planning Committee contemplated a theme for the 2021 Congress, the words of the prophet Malachi captured the imagination of the group: "But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays." We clearly thought that the pandemic would long be behind us and that healing would be in front of us. Instead, we find ourselves at the end of a second year of online programming, with uncertainty as the subtext.

Yet during this time neither the world nor RFC has stood still. In a recent program of Georgetown University's Initiative on Catholic Social Thought and Public Life, entitled "So What Did I Miss? A Look Back, A Look Around, A Look Ahead After Two Years of COVID", the moderator listed some events that have occurred in the U.S. during this time. They include:

- "A global pandemic with nearly a million lives lost in the United States, lockdowns, closed schools and churches, and conflicts over vaccines and masks;
- Two presidential impeachments, one election, a violent attack on the U.S. Capitol, and legislative paralysis;
- The ongoing Russia invasion of Ukraine and the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan:
- Police killings of Black people in our streets and on our screens and a racial reckoning in our cities and hearts:

- U.S. Supreme Court arguments on abortion, voting rights, immigration, and the death penalty;
- Continuing anguish in the wake of the clergy sex abuse crisis; and
- Pope Francis' moral leadership: standing alone in St. Peter's Square at the onset of the pandemic, visiting Iraq and Lesbos, writing Fratelli Tutti, and calling a Synod to listen to laypeople."

What does the Congress theme of "Arise!" mean in this context? And, further, what does formation mean in this context?

Over the past year, amid its own internal changes, the Conference has tried to address these questions through its programming and publications, through internal and external fora, and through Congress conversations. Clearly, the discernment and discussion are ongoing.

It is impossible to look back on the year without extending deep gratitude to the RFC staff for all their flexibility with three staff transitions (Kathy Kandefer, BVM leaving as Operations Manager and Sofia Mikolyash and Brian Michalski beginning as Operations Manager and Program Manager, respectively), three moves (new office, new location for the Together Program, and the start of the InterCongregational Collaborative Novitiate), many starts and stops with Congress

and other program locations, changing office COVID protocols, and much more. We are also grateful for the unwavering support of the RFC Board and its committees, especially the Executive Committee.

And to you, our faithful members, we express our profound thanks for your active participation as well as the many ideas, suggestions, and input you have shared that helped to shape the work of the year.

May we continue to contemplate the Light with healing in its wings and arise!

Ellen Dauwer, SC



(top) The new National Office suite in the Hyde Park Bank Building.

(bottom) Our new staff members (r) Sofia Mikolyash (Operations Manager) and (I) Brian Michalski (Program Manager)

YEAR IN REVIEW

AN OVERVIEW OF 2021 AT THE RELIGIOUS FORMATION CONFERENCE

What did it mean for the Conference to Arise! in 2021? Presented with ongoing challenges and new opportunities, the RFC moved forward in service of initial and ongoing formation for women and men religious.

National Office

In many ways, 2021 was a year of change and transition. From the moving of the National Office to the welcoming of new staff, we relied on the Holy Spirit to guide us (and sustain us!) into an uncertain but emerging future. Take, for example, these significant transitions in the summer of 2021:

- We packed up our National Office at Catholic Theological Union (CTU) and moved into an office suite in the Hyde Park Bank Building.
- The Together community moved out of CTU's residence hall building and transitioned into a apartment in the Hyde Park neighborhood.
- The InterCongregational Collaborative Novitiate (ICCN) found a house in the Hyde Park neighborhood and set up a new home for incoming novices.

The Conference also welcomed two new staff members, Sofia Mikolyash (Operations Manager) and Brian Michalski (Program Manager) and oriented them to their new roles.

Our theme of 'change and transition' reverberated throughout the summer months. While it was a lot in a short amount of time, we are grateful it all went well and believe we are in a great shape as we lean into what the future has in store for us.

In addition to these major changes, the Conference continued to offer outstanding, transformative programming throughout the year. Due to the ongoing pandemic, we had to shift in-person programming to virtual formats, making important modifications along the way while maintaining the creative, engaging, and dynamic nature of our offerings. Over the course of the last couple years the RFC has actively explored ways to enhance the digital experience for those participating in virtual programming.

ForMission

During the summer of 2021, the ForMission Class of 2020 graduated 10 participants while the Class of 2023 began with 23 participants. Staff adjusted the program's timeline and delayed the incoming class to 2023 due to the pandemic.





LCP

The Life Commitment Program also moved online last year. 15 women and men formed the community, featuring participants from several different countries. The Conference was delighted to have the following presentations at the program:

- Religious Life as a Prophetic Enterprise in the 21st Century (Maria Cimperman, RSCJ)
- Vow of Obedience (John Skrodinsky, ST)
- Vow of Celibacy (Mary Pat Garvin, RSM)
- Vow of Poverty (John Barker, OFM)
- Community Life (Nancy Gerth, SCN)



Compromiso de Vida

The Conference desires to create spaces that respond to the ever-growing diversity in religious life. Out of our commitment to address the needs of all our sisters and brothers, we were pleased to introduce in the summer of 2021 the *Compromiso de Vida* program.

Designed from a Hispanic cultural perspective, presented in Spanish, this program invites religious men and women who are discerning or preparing for final vows to share stories and experiences that have led them to this moment of choice: discerning a lifelong commitment to vowed religious life. 12 participants representing the following countries participated: Puerto Rico, Mexico, Peru, Guatemala, El Salvador, Bolivia, and the Republica Democratica del Congo.

The week was facilitated by Adriana Calzada Vázquez Vela, CCVI and Karina Conrad, CDP and included the following presenters:

- Rosalia Meza, VDMF
- Gloria Liliana Franco, ODN
- Xiomara Méndez-Hernández, OP
- Michael Avila, FSC

Webinars

Conference webinars continued to be popular programming in 2021. In March of 2021, we hosted a virtual prayer service to celebrate *Catholic Sisters Week*. Ongoing formation webinars included:

- Surprised by God: A Lenten Invitation to Reflect on God's Surprising Nearness (Christine Zaker, DMin)
- Let Us Dream: A Path to A Better Future (Donald Senior, CP)
- On the Road to Emmaus: Recognizing Jesus in the Journey of Racial Healing (Danielle Harrison, MA, JD).
- Advent Joy: Finding the Rising Star during Uncertain Times (Linda Gibler, OP)

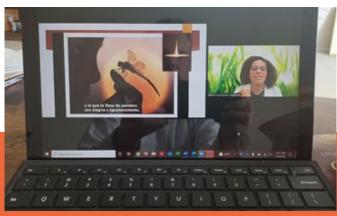
InFormation Magazine

The ever-popular *InFormation*, the Conference's quarterly publication, got a big makeover in 2021. Utilizing a magazine-style layout, we redesigned this resource to better serve our members. It now includes larger type, easier navigation, and backgrounds and graphics more amenable to printing, if desired. Member suggestions were instrumental in this revision. We hope you are enjoying the simplified, modern look.

InFormation continues to include articles on a wide array of topics related to religious life and formation. In 2021 the publication explored such topics as creating communities of hope, working toward racial justice, engaging in ministry at the borders and the margins, assessing readiness for formation, and much more. Book reviews and resource spotlights, also included in the magazine, gave members an overview of new and emerging sources meant to inform, broaden, and deepen the formative journey.

Orientation to Formation

During 2021 the program went through a curriculum redesign to meet the evolving needs of members and changes in religious life today. It will remain virtual and be offered over the course of four weeks, with an optional fifth session specifically designed for those in elected leadership. The newly designed program will be offered in October of 2022.







Virtual events abound in 2021 - from left to right: Compromiso de Vida, webinar, and Mass broadcast at ForMisssion.



Member Areas

The Conference's reinvigorated Member Areas were challenged by not being able to gather for inperson sessions. Nonetheless, Areas found creative ways to offer virtual programming and build digital community. Further, Member Area Liaisons met virtually in September to check in with each other, share best practices and resources, and build community.

Resources Portal

The *new* resources portal, made possible by a generous grant from Conrad N. Hilton Foundation, was launched for members in late 2021. They were offered the opportunity to give input and feedback. Adjustments were made and the portal became public a few months later. 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.

The portal is intended for those in formation ministry, congregational leadership, associate programs, and others who support the formative "From the invitation to the formal presentation, the staff of the Religious Formation Conference displayed openness, trust and welcome to me and to the topic upon which we agreed. How do we understand that the New Covenant calls us to abolish barriers and cultural divisions, especially in consecrated life in the Catholic Church? The entire experience confirmed my sense of hope in how we can 'make a way out of no way.' This endeavor was a blessing." - Fr. Joseph Brown, SJ, Presenter

journeys of those entering religious communities. It serves as a clearinghouse of information to inform both initial and ongoing formation.

A few highlights of the new database include:

- digitized content, including past Resource Manuals, InFormation articles, etc.
- searchable content by keywords and authors
- clickable categories that break down resources by topic

Consultations

The RFC had several opportunities to provide consultation services for members and congregations in 2021. The Conference engaged in an evaluation of a member community's initial formation processes, for example, that included site visits, surveys and other important metrics designed to give the community input, feedback, and best practices moving forward.

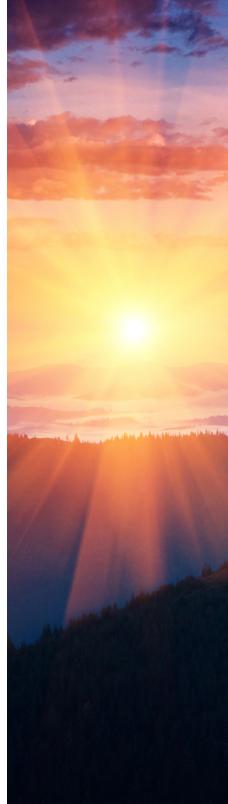
Information Sessions

The RFC hosted several online information sessions to engage those interested in the *Together* program and the new InterCongregational Collaborative Novitiate (ICCN) in 2021. Participants were given an overview of the programs and were able to ask questions regarding the programs'

objective and goals, timeline, and application process.

As this year-in-review demonstrates, the RFC stood boldly at the forefront of nurturing spaces for those in religious life to come together and discern the unfolding path before them. Through it all, we were inspired by the creative and innovative ways people rallied to be Church in challenging times.







2021 RFC CONGRESS NOVEMBER 4-7

While we had hoped to have Congress both in person and online, the rise of cases in early fall necessitated we move to an all-virtual format. We were disappointed not to be able to gather in person yet felt the need to prioritize the health and wellbeing of our members and partners.

The 2021 Congress, however, was a great success! Nearly 300 individuals participated in the online streaming of pre and post Congress workshops, keynote presentations, and seminar sessions. We recognize the following individuals for presenting at the 2021 Congress:





















Pre-Congress Workshop

Intergenerational Living: "From Generation to Generation..."

Mary Pat Garvin, RSM, PhD

Keynote Addresses

Rise Up: Reclaiming Public Space for Good Mary Pellegrino. CSJ

Being a Disciple of Jesus the Migrant **Peter Phan, PhD**

Seminar Sessions

In Their Own Words: Wisdom for Formators from Newer Members

Michelle Lesher, SSJ

Passing on the Gift of Charism: Best Practices and Tools for Formators Frank Santucci, OMI, PhD

Black Catholic Historical Truth Telling as an Anti-Racist Practice of Freedom, Reparation, and Solidarity

Shannen Dee Williams, PhD

Formation as Ritualization: Pondering Embodied Practices

Edward Foley, Capuchin, PhD

Migration for Mission: International Catholic Sisters in the United States - An Overview Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, PhD

Post-Congress Workshop

Sexuality: An Evolving Understanding Lynn Levo, CSJ, PhD

This year, Mary Johnson, SNDdeN, PhD received the **Mary Emil Penet, IHM** award as someone who has made a significant contribution to formation ministry.

Moreover, we were also able to creatively broadcast prayerful and energizing liturgies and provide opportunities for members to meet in small breakout groups throughout the program to unpack what they heard and dialogue with other participants. To make Congress a bit more special this year, we even mailed participants a 'swag bag' filled with informational and fun items from the Conference, our sponsors and exhibitors. We hope this extra touch provided some inspiration to Arise! and continue the journey of growth and learning!

(above) Together participants enjoy the Chicago Architectural Tour on the Chicago

(right) The Together Community visits the new RFC office space for lunch and conversation.



TOGETHER UPDATE

On July 7, 2021, one wing on the seventh floor of the old Catholic Theological Union (CTU) building, best known as "5401," was vacated by three young men and a truck. It was a long and tedious day but after fourteen hours of work, all the furnishings from the *Together* wing of that building found their way into an old but very spacious Hyde Park apartment.

Within a number of weeks, this old and musty apartment, with the assistance of many helping hands, was ready to receive five young sisters who would soon call this space home. This is not to say that there was not still plenty more work to be done! Over time, the five women rearranged furnishings, unpacked boxes, hung draperies, and transformed this unit into a welcoming and lovely living space.

For the first time since the Program's inception, Together has five sisters from five different sending Congregations, who are full-time students at CTU, share community life, and participate in ongoing formation.

Two of this year's participants had already formed 'community' during last year's virtual sessions, Jane Aseltyne, IHM of Monroe, Michigan, and Nicole Varnerin, SND from Chardon, Ohio. Joining these women in community were Youngmi Bae, SC from South Korea, Pulane Makepe, CP from Botswana, and Kelly Williams, RSM of Atlanta, Georgia. All five of these sisters will continue to live in community during the 2022-2023 academic year.

While many highlights of the year are noted in the quarterly *Together* newsletter, let me focus on

some of the topics discussed during our ongoing formation sessions. These topics were identified as areas that the women themselves were interested in exploring in greater depth.

- African American Spirituality (Vanessa White, DMin)
- Theological Reflection (Christina Zaker, DMin)
- Latina Spirituality (Carmen Nanko-Fernandez, PhD)
- Gender Identity with a guest from Giving Voice
- Synodality via Zoom (Maryellen Knuth)
- The Book of Esther (Kate Oxsen, PhD)
- Asian Spirituality (Joanne Doi, MM, PhD)

On Thursday evenings when we did not have a guest, we would converse, share prayer, or engage in theological reflection. On several occasions the community participated in a few "outings." To name a few, there were trips to the outlet mall so Pulane and Youngmi would be better prepared for the Chicago winter, a visit to Millenial Park, the Christkindlmarket, and thanks to the Sisters of Mercy, we all enjoyed the play, "The Notebooks of Leonardo DaVinci" at the Goodman Theater.

Since its inception, the *Together* community has grown steadily. In the fall of 2022, a sixth sister will join this wonderfully diverse community.

As we like to say: the best place to be is *Together*.

To learn more about the program, visit us online at together-formation.com.



INTERCONGREGATIONAL COLLABORATIVE NOVITIATE

After a year of planning and meetings, the InterCongregational Collaborative Novitiate (ICCN) began to feel real and come to life during our move in June and July, 2021.

On July 24th, we invited the Hyde Park formators, RFC staff and friends for a house blessing.

The official opening of ICCN was on August 15 when we ritualized the beginning of the program and welcomed our novices. Soon after, we held orientation at the woods of the Portiuncula Retreat Center in Frankfort, IL.

We established a rhythm for community life with a weekly schedule. A typical week at ICCN includes:

- class at Catholic Theological Union (CTU),
- a ministry day
- charism class in collaboration with the sending congregation or class on religious life by the ICCN directors

- day of prayer and reflection and one-on-one meetings with a designated director
- Intercommunity Novitiate class and integration process
- weekends which include Mass at different parishes and various intercultural activities

Relationship building with peers happened at the weekly Intercommunity Novitate classes held at CTU where 11 congregations gathered to learn from outstanding presenters. The topics for the fall semester were: transitions, biblical reflections on religious life, Myers-Briggs and enneagram, discernment, collaborative leadership, balance and well-being in ministry, building community and conflict management styles, family of origin, being sexual and celibate, prayer and liturgy.

Formators organized monthly days of reflection on a variety of topics for the novices living in the Hyde Park neighborhood. Once a month in the evening, novices and formators participated in pastoral theological reflection. A special aspect of the ICCN was creating opportunities for intercultural encounters through visits to museums, places of worship (Catholic and other), sharing of food from various cultures, watching movies, attending classes, and engaging in dialogue.

The first six months have been exciting and enriching! We look forward to the ICCN community growing this fall as we embark on our second year.

We are grateful to all those who helped launch the ICCN, including the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation for their generous support. Without this interest, financial backing, prayers, and so much more we wouldn't have been able to read the signs of the times and respond with action.

To learn more about the ICCN, visit us online at collaborative-novitiate.com.





(top left) The ICCN visits the Baha'i House of Faith in Wilmette, IL on one of their excursions.

(bottom left) Novices receive a welcome gift at the start of their experience.

(middle) Fr. Robin Ryan, CP blesses the new ICCN house in Hyde Park.

(right) THe ICCN house chapel provides a quiet place for prayer.



RFC MEMBERSHIP

The Membership of the Religious Formation Conference

In 2021, membership in the Conference remained around the 200 mark, that is, some 200 religious congregations either renewed or chose to join the Conference. 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, working 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.

Association of Latin American Missionary Sisters (AHLMA)

Brothers Think Tank

Catholic Health Association (CHA)

Catholic Sisters Week (CSW)

Catholic Theological Union (CTU) and its Formation Council

Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate (CARA)

Center for the Study of Consecrated Life (CSCL)

Communicators for Women Religious (CWR)

Conference of Major Superiors of Men (CMSM) and its Formation Committee

Conrad H. Hilton Foundation

Council of Major Superiors of Women Religious (CMSWR)

GHR Foundation

Giving Voice (GV)

Institute of Religious Formation (IRF)

Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR) and its Leadership Pathways Program Leadership Collaborative

Mexican American Catholic College (MACC)
National Association of Vocation/Formation
Directors (NAVFD; Canada)

National Conference of Vicars for Religious (NCVR)

The National Religious Retirement Office (NRRO)

National Religious Vocation Conference (NRVC)

Religious Brothers Conference (RBC)

Resource Center for Religious Institutes (RCRI)

SOAR! Support Our Aging Religious

USCCB: Office of Clergy, Consecrated Life, and Vocations

"Overall, I really appreciated the ForMission program, from the speakers and the team, and all the participants. It was a great chance to learn and receive up to date information regarding current formation practices and address formator needs in the 21st century."

-Fr. Joseph Nguyen Do, O. Carm

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Ryan Hoffmann
Associate Director
Kathy Kandefer, BVM (until June 2021)
Operations Manager
Sofia Mikolyash (current)
Operations Manager
Brian Michalski
Program Director
Maribeth Howell, OP
Together Program Coordinator

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Ryan Hoffmann (staff)
Sue Weber (consultant)

"The RFC has been a vital source of my ongoing formation and transformation.

The dynamic ForMission Program, annual conference and webinars nurture me spiritually and holistically." -Sr. Christina Conroy, CSSF





CONGREGATION & ORGANIZATION CONTRIBUTIONS

Significant financial support for the RFC comes from 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: financial donations, membership on the 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.

Adorers of the Blood of Christ Adrian Dominican Sisters Benedictine Sisters of Erie Catholic Theological Union Christian Brothers Services Congrégation de Notre Dame Congregation of Bon Secours Congregation of Christian Brothers Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes Congregation of St. Joseph Daughters of Charity Province of St. Louise De La Salle Christian Brothers Delaware Valley Member Area Dominican Sisters of Peace Dominican Sisters of Springfield Illinois Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls Franciscan Sisters of Mary Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration **Guest House**

Holy Union Sisters Hospital Sisters of St. Francis Laboure Society Marianist Province of the US - Brothers and Priests Maryknoll Fathers and Brothers Missionaries of the Precious Blood Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate Morgan Stanley Mother Seton Convent; Clark NJ Norbertine Fathers of Delaware Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary Saint John Vianney Center Saint Luke Institute School of Theology and Ministry - Boston College Shalom Center Sinsinawa Dominican Sisters Sisters of Charity of Cincinnati Sisters of Charity of Halifax Sisters of Charity of Nazareth Sisters of Charity of Saint Elizabeth Sisters of Charity of the Blessed Virgin Mary Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word Sisters of Christian Charity Sisters of Divine Providence Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur Sisters of Social Service of Los Angeles Sisters of St Rita Sisters of St. Dominic

Sisters of St. Joseph (Brentwood)

Sisters of St. Joseph of the Third Order of

Sisters of St. Joseph of Baden

Sisters of St. Joseph of Orange

St. Francis

Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed
Sacrament
Sisters of the Most Precious Blood
Sisters of the Precious Blood
Sisters of the Presentation
Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed
Virgin Mary
Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Mary
Sisters, Servants of the Immaculate Heart of Mary
Southdown Institute

GHR Grant

In the fall of 2021, the Conference was invited to apply for an additional grant from the GHR Foundation, one that would involve collaboration with other organizations. After some initial conversations and discernment, we decided to focus on two areas of strength and need: interculturality and intercongregationality through both praxis and theory. For praxis we chose five current programs/initiatives that could be enhanced and extended through grant funding. By "theory" we plan to host a series of colloquia for a diverse group of newer religious and elected leaders that will deepen conversations around interculturality and intercongregationality and produce sharable content in these key areas. Our partners for this project are the Leadership Collaborative and the Association of Latina Missionary Sisters in America (AHLMA).

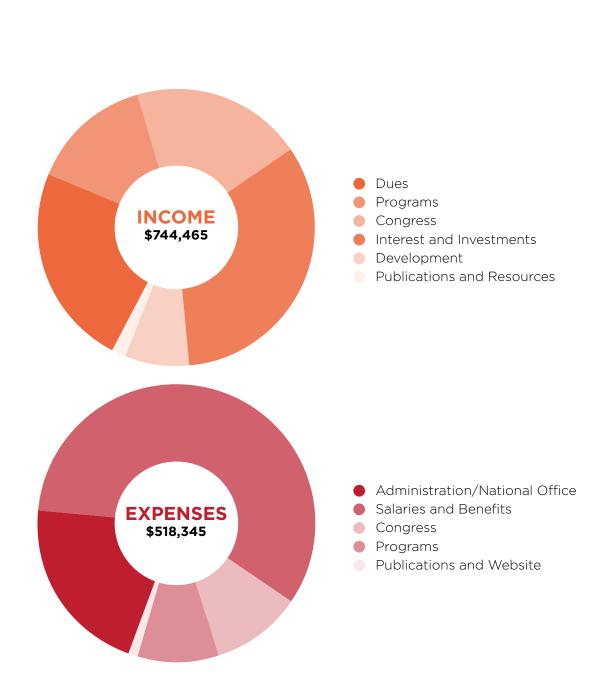
FINANCES

2021 Income

Dues	\$ 176,001
Programs	\$ 106,138
Congress	\$ 148,141
Interest and Investments	\$ 247,149
Development	\$ 56,625
Publications and Resources	\$ 10,411
Total Revenue and Gains	\$ 744,465

2021 Expenses

Net Income	\$ 226,120
Total Expenses	\$ 518,345
Publications and Website	\$ 4,626
Programs	\$ 49,895
Congress	\$ 54,411
Salaries and Benefits	\$ 300,002
Administration/National Office	\$ 109,411







ReligiousFormation

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