

Real Estate Study Group Report

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Introduction

The Catholic Church is the single, largest landowner in the world that is not a government.

Across the U.S. Catholic landscape, religious communities are being invited to read the signs of the times with missionary imagination. Vocation calls those in vowed Religious Life to live the Gospel together. The resources entrusted to us (our time, our people, our finances, and our properties) are meant to serve mission and sustain our life in community. In this light, property is never simply an asset for Religious Institutes: it is part of the concrete way vocation is lived, common life takes shape, and ministry becomes possible.

Many religious congregations and parishes are beginning to realize that the way they think about how property serves the mission needs to change. Many are dealing with aging infrastructure and declining membership. That combination can create a spiral of deferred property maintenance resulting in unusable buildings that can no longer support the mission of the Church or the needs of the Congregation. As a result, finding new ways to leverage property assets is becoming more critical to delivering the Church's mission.

The places the Paulists inhabit and steward shape how we pray, gather, welcome, and serve. This is a reality for all religious congregations as they look to the future and consider where the Holy Spirit is calling them—in mission, in vocation, and in stewarding their resources. Thus, our decisions about property shape not just our financial future but how we will live our vocations and our mission into the future.

National Landscape

Many churches, religious congregations, and Dioceses are beginning to tackle the issue of what to do with their underutilized properties. No longer is the answer as straight forward as selling the property and collecting the money. Below are a few examples of ways Catholic Communities and Congregations of Religious Men have navigated property decisions:

- As many of you may know, our own foundation, St. Austin's, recently redeveloped their property. By ground leasing half their space to a private developer, they will receive an income stream for 99 years. They then collateralized that income stream so they could build a brand new ministry center, school and rectory. Their project was written as a case study by the University of Notre Dame's Fitzgerald Institute for Real Estate. You can read more about it [here](#).
- In Los Angeles, the Executive Director of Our Lady Queen of Angels Housing Alliance, is the face of a new effort to develop affordable housing on underused Catholic-stewarded land in the region.
- The Friars Minor of the Order of St. Francis (OFM) in Boston/New York recently looked at their properties, especially their vacation homes. They gathered statistical data regarding use and property values among other elements to guide decision-making. They suggest engaging the community and their ministerial commitments and considering the community's presence into the future: 10 years from now, what are we capable of? What can bring us joy? This is a unique opportunity to see the future and plan for it.
- The Redemptorist Fathers are becoming one province (United States, Canada, Mexico) in January, 2027 and have made a conscious decision not to look at their properties until they become one province. They are anticipating a challenging process for a variety of reasons, one of which will be navigating property law in each of the countries.

Paulist Realities

The Paulists are not immune to the changes in the U.S. Catholic landscape. Though the Paulist mission and communal life have distinct characteristics, the Paulists are nonetheless navigating the realities of this time, the changing face of vowed religious life, and the implications this creates for their resources. At a minimum, this takes the shape of (1) underutilized residences that may be ill-equipped to support Senior Paulists and (2) properties that may require significant capital improvements to remain viable. The Paulists initially began a process to assess their properties as they relate to supporting men in Senior Ministry. Part of this information was included in the 2025 document, "Transitions for Senior Paulists 2025."

Building off this initial property review, it is recommended that the Paulists undertake comprehensive, holistic stewardship review of their properties, particularly in light of the new property acquisitions in the last two years, necessary capital improvements needed on certain properties, and the Paulists current and future realities.

This is a meaningful opportunity. First, to gain a broader understanding of the Paulists' census and resource needs into the future, closely related to the Paulists' relationship with properties (whether owned or leased, whether used for mission or serving other purposes, etc.) and the financial commitments pertaining to these properties into the future. Equally important, this is an opportunity to consider the future of Paulist life and mission because resources are in service to the mission and vocation of the Paulists. The Congregation should not miss the opportunity to meaningfully engage all Paulists – not just men in Senior Ministry – in envisioning the future of Paulist life and mission so to steward this vision with the necessary resources.

Considerations

In light of the U.S. Catholic landscape and the Paulist realities on the topic, the Real Estate Study Group offers the following considerations for the faithful stewardship of Paulist properties. The Real Estate Study Group suggests that the Paulists aim to complete these initial, foundational phases of property visioning and discernment in the next year, and to share its findings and recommendations toward an implementation plan with the Paulist Community.

Commit to a transparent, participatory process to consider all properties holistically, within the context of the future mission and vocational lives of the Paulists.

- Such a process should be led by an appointed Property Vision Team, made up of the Paulist Presidential Board and key leaders, with accompaniment from real estate professionals and consultants.
- This process should include a robust data-gathering of, at minimum, the following info:
 - Paulist-owned and leased properties, including occupancy and capital needs
 - Where Paulists are currently living
 - Current census of the Paulist Fathers and projections into the future
 - List of Paulist Cemeteries and their capacity
- This process should include engagement of the Paulist community around:
 - Communal discernment of values to guide this process
 - Integration of the property conversation with pastoral and strategic discernment around Communal Life, Vocation, and Mission

Open Questions for the General Assembly's discernment:

- Why are we living where we are living? When we need to make decisions around property, how do we want to make those decisions?
- What is the appropriate relationship with property, in order to support the Paulist vision for mission and community life into the future?
- How will our properties be used for mission into the future?
- What do Senior Paulists (and all Paulists) need to thrive in their vocation? How can/will property support these needs at all points in Paulists' lives and mission?

Additional Resources ([Link](#))

- Paulist Fathers Property Discernment Framework
- Property Information Gathering Worksheet
- Property Discernment Worksheet & Scoring Tool for individual properties
- [Relationships with Property: A Pathway Toward Clearer Decision-Making](#)
- [Reimagining Optimal Property Use: A Values-Based Approach for Religious Communities](#)
- [Navigating Property Decisions: Perspectives for Religious Leaders and Executives](#), Webinar