INTRODUCTION
The records of a national resource office for religious communicators, founded in 1975 and based in Los Angeles, consist of administrative correspondence, minutes of board meetings, reports, financial records, pamphlets, photographs, audio cassettes, and miscellaneous material of the service and its successor organization, the Center for Communications Ministry.

DONOR INFORMATION
The Records of the National Sisters Communications Service were donated to the University of Missouri by the executive director of the organization, Sister Elizabeth Thoman, CHM, on 21 October 1991 (Accession No. 5043), for inclusion in the National Women and Media Collection.

ORGANIZATIONAL HISTORY
In 1974 the New Orleans Sisters Council sought funding from Lilly Endowment, Inc., to develop an educational campaign to teach the general public about recent changes in the lifestyles of women religious, or nuns, in the Catholic archdiocese of New Orleans. When Lilly suggested that a grant might be available for such a project on a national level, representatives of several sisters' organizations such as the National Assembly of Women Religious, the Leadership Conference of Women Religious (LCWR), the National Sisters Vocation Conference (NSVC), and the National Sister Formation Conference (NSFC), as well as the New Orleans Sisters Council, formed a task force to examine the issue. Communications was seen as the key to changing the traditional public image of "nuns" and helping people understand and value the sisters' new roles as competent professionals in a variety of ministries.

The coalition task force created a new organization, the National Sisters Communications Service (NSCS), with Sr. Elizabeth Thoman, CHM, as its executive director. Sr. Elizabeth, founder of the Rainbow Word and Picture Company, a free-lance public relations/advertising agency specializing in communications projects for religious communities, had been working with the New Orleans group. Channeling the money through the established National Sisters Vocation Conference, Lilly Endowment, Inc., funded the fledgling NSCS with start-up/operating funds for 1975-1976. The board of directors of NSCS consisted of representatives of NSVC, NSFC, and LCWR, as well as others in the field of communications. The organization, however, was never an official institution of the Catholic Church.

The original goals of NSCS were manifold and ambitious: to stimulate the use of mass communications by religious communities of women; to train sisters in communications skills; to develop a network of sister-communicators; to provide communications resources, skills and expertise to religious congregations through evaluation and consultation; to develop a national clearinghouse for dispensing information to the media about sisters and religious life; and to provide information to sisters about advocacy positions on social issues involving public media.

It was soon realized, however, that since NSCS was not an official membership organization of individual religious communicators nor an official organization of Catholic sisters, it really could
not serve as their official voice. NSCS decided to concentrate on the training, consultation and resource aspects, while enlarging their audience to include men's religious communities and, later, religious communicators of all denominations. To reflect these changes and to broaden its base of funding, the National Sisters Communications Service changed its name in 1981 to the Center for Communications Ministry.

Funding was a constant problem with NSCS/CCM after the initial start-up grant was expended. They needed the active participation, endorsement, and financial backing of religious institutions in order to work, but, as NSCS/CCM was never part of any official religious structure, that backing never came. Although the organization's quarterly publication, *Media & Values*, and its early training seminars for religious communicators were well received, they and other fee-for-service programs could not sustain the organization. The group did receive a few grants, loans and donations from certain religious communities and individuals, but it was never enough to make up for inflation and the lack of official support from the Catholic hierarchy. In addition, fund raising efforts of the staff took valuable time away from program development. The Center for Communications Ministry ceased to function at the end of 1983.

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

The records of the National Sisters Communications Service document the creation and relatively short life of a small business that attempted to provide services for people working in communications or public relations for religious communities of both women and men in the Catholic Church from 1975 to 1983. They are not only a unique source of information about training in religious communications, but also reflect the effects of the women's movement of the 1970s on women religious in the Church. The records consist of administrative correspondence, minutes of board meetings, reports, some financial records, pamphlets, photographs, audio cassettes and miscellaneous material of the service and its successor organization, the Center for Communications Ministry. They are arranged in six series: **Correspondence**, **Board of Directors**, **Business Records**, **Projects and Programs**, **Religious Congregations**, and **Miscellaneous**.

The **Correspondence** series, arranged chronologically, comprises administrative correspondence, memos, reports, and announcements generated primarily by the executive director, Sr. Elizabeth Thoman, although incoming correspondence and correspondence from other staff members of NSCS/CCM is also included. In addition to discussions about sisters' roles, communications training and skills, and administrative matters, topics of early correspondence include the New Orleans pilot project, aspirations for NSCS, grant requests, consultation with the production staff of a network television series, women in the priesthood, and various other matters. After 1980 an ever-increasing amount of correspondence is devoted to fund raising attempts.

The **Board of Directors** series, also arranged chronologically, consists of announcements and minutes of board meetings, reports from the executive director to the board, and some correspondence, usually related to meetings. The minutes and reports provide the researcher with discussions and reasoning behind policy decisions. Included are photographs of some board members at meetings.

The **Business Records** series consists of the articles of incorporation and by-laws of NSCS/CCM; a chronological section comprising materials relating to the original task force,
formal grant proposals, and analytical reports on the organization, status, priorities, and ultimate dissolution of the corporation; and a section of financial records consisting of budgets, fund raising efforts, tax records, and miscellaneous receipts. The financial records are rather sketchy and do not provide a detailed accounting of the organization's income and expenses, but the various reports furnish information about the corporation's finances, goals and organization.

The **Projects/Programs** series is arranged alphabetically by type or name of project and consists of activities in which NSCS was involved, either as organizer/creator or merely as a participant. The New Orleans Sisters Council's innovative public relations program is included in the case studies material along with less effective projects in Albany, Buffalo and Seattle. Several photographs of sisters at work are included. Other programs include seminars held by NSCS to train sisters in communications skills; newsletter kits, including an instructional audio cassette, to help various religious congregations evaluate and improve their own internal publications; the Religious Communicators Exchange, a less-than-successful attempt in 1981 to form a professional association for people working in communications or public relations for religious communities; and NSCS publications, *Sistersharing* and *Communique*. Also included in this series are scripts of a network television series, "In the Beginning," for which Liz Thoman and NSCS served as consultants, giving advice about the roles of the leading characters, a priest and a sister. The workshops material contains two audio cassettes by Sister Elizabeth and her staff explaining the uses of communications in religious life. Audio cassettes of three speeches taped at a conference sponsored by NSCS in May 1980, discussing "Liberation Media," the role of religious communications in reporting events of the Third World, are included with the World-Share material. A major weakness of this series is the lack of copies of the Service's long-running, award-winning quarterly opinion journal, *Media & Values*.

The **Religious Congregations** series, retained in its original order, is arranged alphabetically by the name of the community of sisters, brothers or priests and is the largest series of this collection. Listing is not necessarily by the official name of the community, but by the commonly known name and geographical location. Words like sisters, society, congregation, etc., are usually not alphabetized and the geographical designation may be by state, city or province, whichever is the most commonly used. Thus, the Franciscan Sisters of the Atonement of Graymoor, in New York, is listed under Atonement/Graymoor. Most often, however, there is not such a great discrepancy between the official and common names. The series includes correspondence, newsletters, evaluations, and photographs of approximately 300 religious communities, mostly from the United States but also from Canada and Europe, that had contact with NSCS/CCM. Although they do contain articles relating to various Christian ministries, the newsletters are primarily internal publications devoted to providing information about members of each religious order to all the community.

The **Miscellaneous** series consists of incomplete appointment calendars for 1975 to 1983; news clippings and class projects of Sr. Elizabeth Thoman not directly related to NSCS; and some pamphlets and publicity material for other religious communications organizations.
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