

Massachusetts Women-Church Records 1982-2012, undated

Creator: Massachusetts Women-Church

Extent: 3.55 linear feet (9 boxes)

Language: English

Repository: Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago. Please contact wlarchives@luc.edu regarding use.

Administration Information

Access Restrictions: None

Usage Restrictions: Copyright was transferred to the Women and Leadership Archives.

Preferred Citation: Identification of item, date, box #, folder #, Massachusetts Women-Church Records, Women and Leadership Archives, Loyola University Chicago.

Provenance: Collection was donated to Women and Leadership Archives by Patricia A. Barry in 2007 (WLA2008.7) and 2012 (WLA2012.47). Additional material was donated by Sr. Claire O'Rourke, Board Member, Lost Coin Women's Fund, Inc. in 2011 (WLA2011.71).

Processor: Marisa Borreca, April 2010; Maria L. Wagner, March 2012; Laura Pearce, January 2014

Processing Information: Finding aid updated December 2025 and September 2026.

Separations: Approximately two linear feet of duplicate and extraneous materials were removed from the collection and discarded.

See Also: Chicago Catholic Women Records, Chicago Women-Church Records, and Women-Church Convergence Records in the Women and Leadership Archives.

Administrative History

In 1988, Marie Sheehan and Dorothy Conceison founded the Massachusetts Women-Church with the goal of eliminating sexism within the Catholic Church. As a member of the Women-Church Convergence, the Massachusetts Women-Church worked to support the ordination of women through annual conferences, awareness campaigns, and respectful witnessings at male ordination ceremonies. The organization consisted of ten to twelve active core group members who met once a month to plan activities and conferences that promoted the eradication of sexism and church hierarchy. They also had a quarterly newspaper with a mailing list of over a thousand people in the New England area. Their annual conferences drew over 200 people on average, and often featured nationally known feminist theologians, such as Rosemary Radford Ruether, Joan Chittister, and Theresa Kane. The core group members also participated in discussion with the Jesuit priests in the Boston area. The Jesuit meetings were a point of pride for the organization, but the Jesuits eventually terminated the meetings in 2000.

In order to establish a fundraising arm for Massachusetts Women-Church, Marie Sheehan, Sr. Claire O'Rourke, and a number of Massachusetts women organized Lost Coin Women's Fund, Inc. (LCWF), a charitable organization. The mission of the organization is to provide scholarships to low-income Massachusetts women so they may attend an undergraduate institution or vocational training program. LCWF was established in 1992 and is still in existence as of 2026.

An important event in the history of the Massachusetts Women-Church came in 1999 when the Boston Archbishop, Cardinal Bernard Law issued a hospitality ban against the group. Due to their staunch support of women's ordination, church officials asked to meet with the Massachusetts Women-Church to discuss their controversial stance. When the women declined to meet the official at his office, preferring instead to meet on more neutral territory, they were informed that the Cardinal had already asked local religious institutions to prohibit the group from holding events or meetings on church property. The ban received attention both from local and national newspapers, and the group continued with their efforts, despite the lack of support from church officials.

In 2007, after almost twenty years of activity, the Massachusetts Women-Church decided to formally discontinue their work.

Scope and Content

The Massachusetts Women-Church Records contain materials relating to the group's support of equality within the Catholic Church. The collection consists of materials that date from the group's founding in 1988 to its dissolution in 2007/2008. The records include extensive administrative records, conference materials, newspaper articles relating to both the group in particular and to women's issues within the Catholic Church, photographs, scrapbooks, video tapes, and the recorded oral history of the organization. The materials are arranged alphabetically within each series.

Series 1: Administrative, 1987-2012, undated, Boxes 1-4

Contains material relating to the administration of Massachusetts Women-Church from its beginning in 1987, which includes mission statements, histories, newsletters, general correspondence, and financial documents. Other documents relate to the 1995-2000 meetings with Boston-area Jesuits, and the 1999 hospitality ban against the group. Also includes information about the Lost Coin Fund from its establishment in 1992 with articles of incorporation, bylaws, 2010 Annual Report, policy and procedure manual, and website printout.

Series 2: Events and Conferences, 1988-2006, Boxes 4-6

Contains material from events organized by the Massachusetts Women-Church and also events attended by group members. Materials include planning notes, correspondence with event speakers, conference pamphlets and agendas, registration lists, event evaluations, and flyers.

Series 3: News Articles, 1982-2006, Box 6

Contains articles written about the group and their activities, especially their respectful witnessing and annual conferences. Also includes several editorials written by Marie Sheehan, Barbara Mahar, and Dorothy Conceison. Many articles also relate to issues important to the group such as women's ordination, sexism within the church, and church hierarchy.

Series 4: Photos and Scrapbooks, 1990-2006, Boxes 7-11

Contains photographs of many of the Massachusetts Women-Church organized conferences, as well as events attended by group members. Also contains pictures from respectful witnessing protests. Two of the scrapbooks cover the general history of the group, while one is devoted entirely to the St. Lawrence Women Ordinations, and the other focuses on the Lost Coin Women's Fund.

Series 5: Audiovisual Materials, 1991-2007, Box 12

Contains an audio recording of the 1991 Proclaiming Our Power conference with Theresa Kane. Also includes a VHS recording of the respectful witnessing of the 2001 Boston ordination ceremony, along with the subsequent TV news stories about the witnessing. Another VHS tape is of the 1993 Women Transforming Church conference with Rosemary Radford Ruether. The two audio CDs contain the oral history of the Massachusetts Women Church, as told by co-founder Marie Sheehan.

Series 6: 3-D Objects, 2005, Box 13

Contains two scarves and a tote bag from the Women's Ordination Conference July 22-24, 2005, in Ottawa, Canada, which was attended by several core group members.

Subjects:

Boston (Archdiocese)
Catholic Church
Lost Coin Women's Fund, Inc.
Roman Catholic Church
Sexism
Women Church Convergence
Women's Ordination

Box	Folder	Title	Dates
		<i>Massachusetts Women-Church Records, 1983-2012, undated</i>	
		Series 1: Administrative Records, 1987-2012	
1	1	Bank Statements and Expenses	1989-2006
1	2	Core Group Meeting Minutes	1988-1989
1	3	Core Group Meeting Minutes	1990-1991
1	4	Core Group Meeting Minutes	1992-1993
1	5	Core Group Meeting Minutes	1994-1995
1	6	Core Group Meeting Minutes	1996-1997
1	7	Core Group Meeting Minutes	1998-1999
1	8	Core Group Meeting Minutes	2000-2001
1	9	Core Group Meeting Minutes	2002-2003
1	10	Core Group Meeting Minutes	2004-2007
1	11	Correspondence	1987-1990
1	12	Correspondence	1991-1994
2	1	Correspondence	1995-1997
2	2	Correspondence	1998-2000

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2	3	Correspondence	2001-2002
2	4	Correspondence	2003-2004
2	5	Correspondence	2005-2008
2	6	Correspondence	undated
2	7	Death of Marie Sheehan	2012, undated
2	8	Dorothy Conceison Funeral Documents	2008
2	9	Herstory of Massachusetts Women Church	1990
2	10	Herstory of Massachusetts Women Church	1992
2	11	Hospitality Ban	1999
2	12	Injustice Against Women Through History	1997
2	13	Jesuit Meetings	1995-2002
2	14	Jesuit Correspondence	1995-2000
2	15	Lost Coin Women's Fund: Organizational Records	2011
2	16	Members: Core Groups	1990-2002, undated
3	1	Memberships and Donations	1996-2000
3	2	Mission Statements and Timeline	1996-2003, undated
3	3	Newsletters	1988-2006
3	4	Newsletters—Duplicates	1990-2004
3	5	Notes	1992, undated
3	6	Pastoral Letter Documents	1990
3	7	Research Documents	1983-2003, undated
3	8	Spirited Women Documents	1988-1991
3	9	Press Materials	1994, undated
3	10	Treasurer's Report	1989-2003
3	11	Sr. Plante Documents	1996-1997
3	12	Taxi Cab Campaign	2001
		Series 2: Events and Conferences, 1988-2006	
3	13	An Afternoon with Angela Bonavoglia	2006
3	14	Beyond Crisis with Mary Hunt	2002
4	1	Birthing New Communities with Virginia Hoffman	1991
4	2	Catholic Women Informational Meeting	1990
4	3	Conversation and Reflection on Beijing Conference	1995
4	4	A Day with Mary Magdalene	2003
4	5	Discipleship of Equals Conference	1992
4	6	Discipleship to a Priestly People with Joan Chittister	2003
4	7	An Evening with Fr. Tissa Belasuriya	1997
4	8	Fall Liturgy	1990
4	9	Jesus as Affirming, Church as Denigrating with Elizabeth Dodsens Gray	1995
4	10	Leadership Conference of Women Religious	1998-1999
4	11	Made in the Image of God with Elizabeth Shussler Fiorenza	1999
4	12	Many Yet One with Jose Hobday	1996
4	13	Mary for the Progressive Woman	1996

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4	14	Proclaiming our Power with Theresa Kane	1990
4	15	Rediscovering a Partnership Society with Rianne Eisler	2004
4	16	Respectful Witnessing	1993-2004
4	17	Roots and Wings	1998
4	18	Spirit of Life: A Celebration	1991
4	19	St. Lawrence Ordination of Women Priests	2005
5	1	Sr. Jeanette Normandin Courage of Conscience Award	2000
5	2	Ways Forward I	1997
5	3	Ways Forward II	1998
5	4	Ways Forward III	1999
5	5	Weaving Massachusetts Women-Church	1989
5	6	Women Church Conference	1987
5	7	Women Church Convergence	1999-2000
5	8	A Women Church Harvest with Diann Neu	2000
5	9	Women Church Society	2001
5	10	Women Claiming Responsibility with Miriam Therese Winter	1994
5	11	Women on the Prophetic Journey	1998
5	12	Women's Ordination Conference	1995
5	13	Women's Ordination Worldwide	2001
5	14	Women's Ordination Worldwide	2005
5	15	Women's Perspectives	2001
6	1	Women Transforming Church with Rosemary Radford Ruether	1993
6	2	Women Transforming Church Conference Evaluations	1993
		Series 3: News Articles, 1982-2006	
6	3	News Articles	1982-1992
6	4	News Articles	1993-1995
6	5	News Articles	1996-1999
6	6	News Articles	2000-2001
6	7	New Articles	2002-2006
6	8	News Articles	undated
		Series 4: Photos and Scrapbooks, 1990-2006	
6	9	An Afternoon with Angela Bonavoglia	2006
6	10	Core Group Gatherings	2004-2006
6	11	Discipleship to a Priestly People with Joan Chittister	2003
6	12	Evensong Chapel Dedication	2005
6	13	God's Gift for a New Church with Dr. Ida Reming	undated
6	14	Jesus as Affirming, Church as Denigrating with Elizabeth Dodsden Gray	1995
6	15	Lost Coin Women's Fund Event with Evelyn Murphy	2005
6	16	Many Yet One with Jose Hobday	1996

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6	17	Massachusetts Women Church Retreat	1993
6	18	Marie Sheehan's Birthday Celebration	2001
6	19	St. Lawrence Ordination of Women Priests	2005
6	20	Proclaiming our Power with Theresa Kane	1990
6	21	Rediscovering a Partnership Society with Rianne Eisler	2004
6	22	Respectful Witnessing at Holy Cross Cathedral	1999
6	23	Respectful Witnessing at Holy Cross Cathedral	2001
6	24	Respectful Witnessing at Holy Cross Cathedral	undated
7	1	Respectful Witnessing in Baltimore	undated
7	2	Taxi Cab Campaign	2001
7	3	Unidentified Conferences	undated
7	4	Voice of the Faithful Conference	2002
7	5	Ways Forward I	1997
7	6	Women Church Convergence Meeting	2000
7	7	Women Church Convergence	undated
7	8	Women Claiming Responsibility with Miriam Therese Winter	1994
7	9	Women on the Prophetic Journey	1998
7	10	Women's Ordination Worldwide	2005
7	11	Women Transforming Church with Rosemary Radford Ruether	1993
7	12	Women Transforming Church with Rosemary Radford Ruether—Contact Sheet	1993
7	13	Scrapbook [1 of 2]	2001-2006
7	14	Scrapbook [2 of 2]	2001-2006
7	15	Scrapbook: We Will Be Each Other's Light in the Darkness [1 of 2]	1987-2005
7	16	Scrapbook: We Will Be Each Other's Light in the Darkness [1 of 2]	1987-2005
8	1	Scrapbook: St. Lawrence Ordination	2005
8	2	Scrapbook: Lost Coin Women's Fund	1994-2005
8	3	Scrapbook	2000-2001
		Series 5: Audiovisual Materials, 1991-2007	
8	4	Proclaiming our Power with Theresa Kane [audiocassette]	1990
8	5	Recorded History of Massachusetts Women-Church [CD]	2007
8	6	Recorded History of Massachusetts Women-Church: Duplicate [CD]	2007
8	7	Witnessing at Holy Cross Cathedral [VHS]	2001
8	8	Women Transforming Church with Rosemary Radford Ruether [VHS]	1993

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Series 6: 3-D Objects, 2005			
9	1	Women's Ordination Worldwide [2 scarves]	2005
9	2	Women's Ordination Worldwide [tote bag]	2005