

# Women Religious Archives Collaborative

BY LAUREL WILSON



Architect's rendering of the new WRAC property.

The Ursuline Sisters of Louisville Archives contains invaluable records showing the remarkable impact our Sisters have had in the communities they've served for the past 165 years. As archivist, I receive dozens of requests each year from scholarly researchers, former students of Ursuline schools, family genealogists related to an Ursuline Sister, and others who have been touched by the Ursulines in some way and who are seeking information only our records can provide.



L to R: WRAC Archivist Ellen Pierce, USAE Communications Director Kathy Williams and USAE Archivist Laurel Wilson view the Heritage Room timeline in the Ursuline Motherhouse.

As religious congregations reach completion, researchers will look to those communities' records to learn how these women-led congregations

functioned and how the Sisters lived their lives. But our archives are more than just a historical record, they are a touchstone for future generations who will carry on the Ursuline charism, bearing fruit from the labors of the Sisters.

Therefore, it's critical to ensure archival collections from religious congregations like ours are safeguarded for the long term. As communities make plans for reaching completion, it's important that they make arrangements to protect their archival records in perpetuity.

According to a 2022 survey from the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, 32 percent of archivists for religious congregations are concerned about whether their archives will continue to be preserved as their congregation comes to completion.

About two years ago, our Leadership Team (in consultation with archives) committed to joining the Women Religious Archives Collaborative (WRAC). WRAC will build a facility in Cleveland that will be a

permanent repository for the archival collections of more than a dozen women religious congregations from the region. It will offer researchers a centralized hub to study the records of numerous congregations in one location. In addition, the building will include space for exhibits and programs to engage with the public about women religious.

"As religious communities become smaller and as women religious have always practiced, collaboration is key for this decision," Ursuline president, Sister Jean Anne Zappa, said. "We are not just preserving archival material and records, we are preserving stories and events of women religious who have dedicated their lives to the gospel, sharing it with countless persons they touched through their mission and ministries. The persons we touched are now touching the lives of others, and we want to preserve and tell the wonderful stories of the gifts, impact and blessings religious women have had on individuals, the church and society."

The Louisville Ursulines have substantial involvement in WRAC:

- Sister Jean Anne is president of the WRAC Board of Directors.

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—*Sr. Jean Anne Zappa*

- I am part of the WRAC Archivist Committee, which is helping congregations prepare their materials for eventual transfer and advising the WRAC board on what features the center will need to store the collections.
- Ursuline Society and Academy of Education (USAE) Communications Director Kathy Williams serves on the WRAC Communications Committee, which is creating the WRAC website and other materials.
- USAE Finance Director Becky Phillips is treasurer for the

WRAC Board of Directors, and also chairs the WRAC Finance Committee, which provides budget oversight and financing options for the project.

Currently, 28 congregations have joined WRAC, including three other Ursuline congregations: the Ursuline Sisters of Cincinnati, Toledo, and Cleveland. There is also another community from Kentucky on board: the Sisters of Loretto.

WRAC is in the process of securing property for the facility in a central area of downtown Cleveland. It will be close to the Saint Vincent

Health Campus, where the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine have had a ministry presence since 1865. Bostwick Design Partnership will be handling Phase One of the project, which includes all programming, design work and pricing for the construction.

**On the donation envelope included in this issue of the DOME, you will notice WRAC is now one of the categories you can select to specify where you'd like your donation to go.** “We invite you to be an important part of this endeavor to continue the works of our community in a new way,” Sister Jean Anne said. In doing so, you can help ensure that our efforts to preserve our archival collection will bear fruit for future generations. 🌐

*For more information, please visit [www.archivescollaborative.org](http://www.archivescollaborative.org).*

