

Interview with Sister Mary Cramer  
December 1, 1998; Chicago, Illinois  
Interviewer: Angela Abbinante  
Begin Tape 1, Side 1

Abbinante: It's December first, nineteen ninety-eight and this is an interview with Sister Mary Cramer. I want to begin with your childhood and I wonder if you can tell me about your family and where you grew up.

Cramer: Allright. I was born in a neighborhood that has changed over the years, called Albany Park. My mother and father built a home there in 1913, and it gives me pleasure to go back because the home still looks good, on the corner of Ainsley and Christiana. My mother and father came from South Bend. We didn't have any cousins around, or relatives in Chicago and we used to go to South Bend. I went the first two years to Hibbard School, and I was so amused recently that school that goes back that far, and the area is so crowded they are building an addition to my first elementary school. I think that is hilarious! [Laughs]

AA: Where did you go to high school?

MC: I went to Immaculata, which was taught by the BVM Sisters. I started at Hibbard, and then we went for one year to California, where most of the Cramers had emigrated, but for various reasons we were the only Cramers who came back to the midwest, so when I came back I went to Catholic School at Our Lady Of Mercy. It was ten blocks away, kind of a long walk but anyhow I graduated from there and at that time, about half of the graduates went to the Franciscan high school called (Alvirnia) and half

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went to this new, fairly new BVM school , Immaculata. The building still stands at Irving Park and the Lake, but our Sisters have not been there for quite a while.

AA: I need to back up. Do you have any brothers or sisters?

MC: I have one sister. And happily she married and gave me all these wonderful

nieces and nephews, who in turn have given me grand-nieces and nephews,

even have a third generation great-grand-nephew who is two. [Laughs] So, the two of us grew up and we are very different, and we talk about our differences. She was a little tomboy, she had a train, she had a wagon, a teddy bear and I was a prissy little girl, I liked tea parties and dolls.

[Laughs]

AA: You mentioned, which is very important, you were in the first class at Mundelein.

MC: Yes I was. When I was a senior in high school, I finally decided I had a vocation to the BVM's. So I approached my family. Well, my mother thought I was too young, so I was agreeable about it, and she was not opposed to it, so I thought, well, I'll go to this new college that the BVM's are opening on the north side, Mundelein College. So I did, and it was a very, very, exciting year because the freshmen were over two-hundred, and

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there were approximately thirty-two sophomores in transfer, and a few less of juniors. So naturally the freshmen ran the whole school, at least we thought we did! [Laughs] I brought along my yearbook and we can talk about a few of the events that took place then.

AA: Sure.

MC: One of the things as you look at this yearbook that is amazing is that in one

year they produced so many organizations. Every class of course had class officers, and I had the vote for secretary for the freshman class. Then in the second semester they decided to have a student council, and I became treasurer of that. I sound like the organization woman! [Laughs] One of the things that attracted me was the Debate Club, so I became President of the Debate Club. But all of the clubs were simply fascinating, there were

so

many. There was the Glee Club of course, there was the Orchestra, the Commerce Club, the Mundelein Cecilians which were singers, the

Debating

Club, the Home Economics Club, one I can't quite pronounce, the German Club, the Chemistry Club, there were clubs for everything and everyone.

And everybody joined something.

AA: Just to back up again, just a moment, what made you decide, or what got you interested in becoming a member of the BVM's ?

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MC: The BVM's? Well first of all in the beginning of my high school life, it never occurred to me. [Laughs] I was going to be married, and have three children. Why three, I'm not quite sure. And I was interested in becoming an interior decorator. My dad was a lawyer, and I thought that would be very interesting, to be a lawyer. And then, in junior year, I do not even know the name of the priest who gave the retreat, but he certainly made an impression on me, and I felt that I really was called to be a member of the BVM's. My friends were greatly shocked, but I didn't tell anyone until the very end, when we were leaving in June of 1930. And they were quite surprised, let's put it that way. [Laughs] Apparently they had not seen in me a future BVM. [Laughs]

AA: How interesting. And did you choose Mundelein then because of the BVM's?

MC: Oh, once you enter the community, you are devout and obedient. And in those days it was quite strict, indeed. So, my first assignments were in the elementary school. And I have always rejoiced that I had started in second grade. Because in second grade you do not go from A to D. You go from

A to B to C. You go right up the line. You take nothing for granted. And over the years, even teaching college students, you take nothing for

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granted. You fill in all the details. [Laughs]

AA: And the BVM's are very regimented, in that way?

MC: I was apparently very impressed by the BVM's. I had them in high school, see, and then, of course, here in college. So, I'd like to tell you a few little things that happened in that first year. One of the most exciting things was the dedication of the college in the spring. We always like to joke about the late Cardinal Mundelein, who gave us his name and a pipe organ, we were on our own for the rest! [Laughs] And the BVM's from the whole United States contributed in so many ways, in helping to finance the BVM college.

We had another college in Dubuque Iowa, that is still going strong, Clarke College, but everybody had their hand in helping Mundelein get started. Then in the spring, we had the dedication of the college and oh, that was a fine event. The president of the college was a very interesting woman. Her name was Sister Justicia Coffey. The building in which we are sitting now is named after her, Coffey Hall, and she was a woman of great determination. What Sister Justicia wanted, Sister Justicia always got, so

during the time of the dedication, she was able to persuade the police department or the powers that be, to change the traffic so it did not come by Mundelein College and be in the way of the Cardinals' car and that of the clergy that might attend. So they had to be sidetracked

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while the father arrived in great splendor. Then of course we had learned all kinds of wonderful songs for the occasion, and a man who is very venerable in the archdiocese as a choral director, was Otto (Singenberger), so of course we had him for a director. Of course that was a momentous occasion. [Laughs]

AA: What do you remember about the building itself?

MC: The building was special and unique. Apparently, as legend has it, that the first architect was going to have a building with pillars in a somewhat colonial appearance, and Sister Justicia wasn't happy with that. So a younger man became the architect. And we have this wonderful piece of art deco, and when I take you downstairs we can go over to Mundelein and see some of the interesting samples of art deco right on the first floor of the college. And of course in those days, a skyscraper college was unique. It's not unique anymore, but it was very unique, and of course we went to classes on the elevator, and that was exciting, except you were supposed to walk up the first three or four flights and not expect to use the elevator. And

I suppose looking back now the discipline was fairly tight. But we enjoyed the life, we had a lot of fun. We weren't supposed to go off campus, during the time we were here during the day. Occasionally I would get to campus in the family car, for some reason, and sometimes we would sneak up to

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Evanston and around Northwestern during the noon hour. Another place we were not always encouraged to go to was a gathering place and restaurant under the "El" tracks called the (Inaday). And the Loyola fellows could be seen at the (Inaday) and the Mundelein girls would know to drift over there. We had some interesting experiences with Loyola, we had dances that were called tea dances because they were in the late afternoon. And the room that is no longer called the social room on the second floor of the college was the scene of these dances. They were a lot of fun. And then we debated with Loyola, too, because we had a Debate Club, and many of the debates we won. [Stops for a sip of water] Go ahead.

AA: You spent a year, then at Mundelein.

MC: Just a year.

AA: And then you moved to Clarke College.

MC: No, I entered the community's what they called the [ unclear ] training for young novices, and it was in Dubuque Iowa, and in the beginning my





mother had a very dear friend in Santa Barbara California so she and my sister and I went out for a rather lengthy visit, and it was time for me to come back you know, and get my things ready to go, but they were going to have a fiesta, out there in Santa Barbara, and my mother thought it was

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a shame that I would miss the fiesta, so we wrote to the head of the congregation, Mother Isabel, and explained. Well she said that's all right I could be late but I had to be there by September eighteenth, canonically you're supposed to have six months as a postulate before you receive the habit and your religious name and [ unclear ] to the bishop. So, I arrived all by myself on September eighteenth, all the rest of the group was there ahead of me but they quickly got me into my black poplin that we had to wear at the time, and I had to settle down very quickly. [Laughs]

AA: What did the training consist of?

MC: Well, the training was very interesting, they wanted us to become religious women. And so, in the beginning during the first six months of postulancy we took college courses but we also had a great deal of work in theology, which in those days was simply called religion. We learned how to pray the

Ages office which is a set of prayers that have come down from the Middle Ages and we led a fairly strict existence. Silence was rather important. It's

remarkable because everyone for the most part seemed to cooperate and when people weren't happy they were allowed to go home, and a few of our set, as they called them, set or class, a few of our set did indeed leave. So you were at the end of the first six months were received, as they called it in a reception ceremony. You received a habit and I'll have to show you

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a picture of it, they were wondrously made, I must say. [Laughs] The idea that a religious habit comes down from the medieval times and you received your identity, and you were supposed to take on that new identity, and a new name of the patroness, so I was very devoted to Francis of Assisi. I would like to have had Jane Francis, because my sister was Jane, but they had a sister by that name. I would like to have had Theresa Francis, like the little flower, there was great devotion in those days for the little flower, of St. Therese of [unclear] but we had a Therese Francis, so, the postulate mistress as she was called, said there had been a very astute teacher by the name of Sister Assisium. Now isn't that a fearful name? [Laughs] In Latin, you know which had never been my favorite subject. But, that's what I became. My best friends did not always know how to spell it. And until modern times in the sixties after the Vatican II Council, we all had these various saints names.

AA: So you were called Sister...

MC: Mary Assisium. How about that? [Laughs] and you rarely used your family name. After Vatican II, so much of that changed and things became more natural, most people went back to their old baptismal names and things changed a great deal. At that time the Dominicans, the Mercy's the BVM's we were all trained along the same lines.

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AA: During that time, after being at Mundelein for about a year, and training for

a year at Dubuque, your family realized then that...

MC: Oh, yes, they were quite pleased, they really were, and our full training at Dubuque was two and a half years, so you graduated as a member being a junior novice after you got the habit, to being a senior novice and then finally a profession novice, then everybody took profession vows. So you learned many things, during the, what they call a canonical year, the junior year, you did not study secular subjects just religious studies. Then when you are a senior novice you went back to the classroom and continued your college education. So we were there for two and a half years, and then we pronounced our first vows of poverty, chastity, and obediency for one year. We took temporary vows, as they were called, every year for six years, and then at the end of that time, they figured you ought to know your mind, and if you still wanted to you were allowed to make your [ unclear ] vows.

AA: Interesting.

MC: Uh huh.

AA: And then did you attend Clarke College?

MC: I did, yes. Actually, my AB degree is from Clarke. Because we would go to

summer school there. In those days, we could teach in the elementary grades without a college education, and so my first assignment was second

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grade in the Cathedral Parish in Sioux City, Iowa. I didn't know much about Sioux City Iowa, but I learned. [Laughs] And while I was there, it was a Cathedral Parish, and we had a wonderful dear man, Bishop Healy, for whom the high school was later named, and he loved ceremony. And I was eventually in charge of altar boys, I don't know if you have ever seen altar boys in action, but in those days they had a very important part to play. So lo and behold, I learned how to train altar boys, and that was the end of our [ unclear ] My second mission was Rapid City, South Dakota, further west, and again I fell err to the altar boys. That was a very interesting experience in South Dakota. You have seen pictures of the

faces

of the presidents on Mt. Rushmore, but believe it or not I was there when they were being carved. They had a Swedish sculptor by the unusual name of Gutson Bjorglin, I've never forgotten, and sometimes on the weekend

people might take us out for a ride or a picnic and we'd go out and would be able to watch the progress going on. And so I have great fond affection for Mt Rushmore, it's part of my history. And then, let's see...what happened to me after that. I think by that time I had finished by AB degree and I was sent to my first teaching assignment at the high school level. I came back to my alma mater, Immaculata and I had a freshman homeroom, and it was very very, interesting. Some of the people that I taught there are in our community today and so they like to tease me about some of my

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little quirks, you know, every teacher has quirks. [Laughs] It was a very interesting period and it was a wonderfully exciting school. And then at the end of five years in those days our community spread from New York to California, a large number in California, a large number in the midwest, just a few in the east. And so at the end of, since I got the degree I was prepared to teach high school, and so I was sent to Immaculata. And then much to my surprise, after five years, oh, I was going to say, all the sisters were divided into four provinces and each had a superior who could change you from one place to another you understand, and you rarely went outside your province, usually changes were made within your province, but then one year, 1935, I was changed to what was called St. Joseph

Province, and the headquarters for them was Des Moines, Iowa. So I went from Chicago to Iowa and it was a very interesting experience. The school I attended, taught at, was St. Joseph Academy that had been built way back in the late eighties and it had become a central high school, Catholic high school, the only one in the city. Des Moines is not devoutly Catholic, and...

[Stop tape]

I stayed at St. Joseph Academy in Des Moines for eight years, and it was a very pleasant and very happy time. The school was large and the people, especially the students, were fun. I enjoyed it very much, and then in 1953,

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I was changed to Mundelein College where I became a teacher of history, and handled a freshman homeroom, we were responsible for a group that became (councellees) and that kind of thing.

AA: Were you transferred there? Or did you request it?

MC: I was transferred, yes indeed, and it was the second major transfer I had and the only one outside the original province, now I'm in another province, over at Mundelein College, but it was very interesting to come back to Mundelein where I had begun my work with the BVM's. So, I taught freshman history and in those days we all taught religion it was not yet called theology, to our own homeroom. That was an extra curriculum, extra work of course because your degree was in history, and you really

had to work mighty hard to be able to stand before those young women and teach anything else, like religion. And then, much to my amazement, after I had been here just two years, I was appointed Dean of Students, and that was so interesting because Sister (Bernarda) who had taught me French when I was a student and had been Dean of Students for I believe, eighteen years, and she was marvelous. She had a wonderful disposition, the students liked her very much, and she had started a Mother's Auxiliary and a Father's Club as supports for the college, and to be asked to step in her shoes, into her shoes was a bit scary, let's put it that way. But in those

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days when you were told to do something, you didn't argue, you just assumed that God's grace would come down and believe me, you did it.

AA: You must have been a wonderful teacher, then.

MC: I don't know whether I was a wonderful teacher or not. [Laughs] But I think Sister (Bernarda) was ready to retire and I'm not quite sure why I was appointed but indeed I was and it was a post that I had for, oh, thirteen years. It was interesting because the Dean of Students had some special responsibilities. In those days, every year there was an annual student benefit, a benefit for the college, it was a major event and a serious event, in a sense that we were expected to make a good profit, so, it took its form usually of having a performance. So we sometimes had a

theaters performance here on campus. Other times it would be at one of the downtown. And we had, these are old names now, we had [unclear] Williams, who may not be known to you, but he was quite a stellar actor, and we also had Burgess Meredith, another stellar actor. There was a great deal of work involved in these kind of things, and all of the students had to get involved. They had to sell tickets, they had to publicize the event, and, it was really a very exciting thing, and usually they were financially successful, it was no small thing. Besides being responsible for the student benefit, automatically the Dean of Students was in charge of what we called the Concert Lecture Series, and we had a rather small budget. So,

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uh, we had a very good agent who would try to provide us with some good performers, and, uh, the students were obliged, and I do mean obliged. It was required to attend all these student assemblies. Some of them they enjoyed, others I think they would have truly have seen missed. But there was a little fine imposed on them if they were not in their required seats. The sort of the thing that nobody could expect that of students today, but they confessed later on that they really absorbed a great deal from it. So we sort of pushed culture right down their throats.

AA: That was the purpose of the program?

MC: Well, yes. To increase, their, uh, rather, widen their horizons. Provide them



with culture, intellectual experiences. I remember we had a troupe of Swedish ballet dancers that were down, and you had Peter (Niro) who was just at the height of his career and, uh, Joan Collins who was his affiliate. He would come out on the stage, he was a benefit for families, see, so he would come out and he would sing, but he had a little recess, so then Joan Collins who was just beginning her career would come and sing during the interval, and it gave me great pleasure a few years ago to see the mature Joan Collins out at Ravinia. It is a beautiful, beautiful family place outside Chicago. So that was another duty of the Dean of Students, and then you always had to supervise the graduation, exercises, and nowadays when you

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see students throwing their caps up in the air, you know, and all that kind of thing, oh, us old timers, we roll our eyes because they walked in, I'll have you know, to music, stately music, uh, they practiced, the gowns were measured so they could all be of equal length from the floor, who would bother doing anything like that today, you know, its ridiculous. But they had it taken for granted and uh, I must say the commencements were very beautiful, very dignified, and um, some of my nieces and nephews tell me other stories about their experiences in modern times [Laughs]..

AA: Um, as Dean of Students, how did you understand the mission of Mundelein College? And what was your goal when you became Dean?

MC: That is a very interesting question. Our mission here at Mundelein, had

been sort of given to us by Cardinal Mundelein, we wanted a city college that would attract young women who might not be able to afford to go away although [unclear] But he wanted us to establish a religious and urban college which we did, and there were other goals....

[end of side A, tape one]

[side B, tape one]

but to provide them with a good religious background, uh, they had chosen the Catholic college, and we felt inclined to provide them with the opportunities inclined toward Catholics, and looking back at our opening,

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uh, so many of them had really bothered us by their uh, [unclear]

AA: Um, in 1957 Mundelein was the largest Catholic women's college in Illinois, and student activism began to develop. How do you perceive student life at that time in the atmosphere of a women's college? I just wanted to touch on this.

MC: Right. Well they became involved in uh, in things here in Chicago, and the uh, [unclear] many did not think about it until of course after the martyrdom of uh, um, King. When he was killed that generated great, great passionate response and I think that the kind of change that took place on all campuses probably came to a head in the early seventies and on the campus of Mundelein. It started elsewhere earlier, I had been Dean, I had

been here for fifteen years and I had been Dean for thirteen of those, and I, I really thought that it was time to bring in new blood and to provide, uh, another person with the experience, and to provide the students with another person, too, so in 1968 I tendered my resignation, and that was an acceptable thing to do, there was a time when that would never occur to people to resign you would take an assignment and stay until you were told to go elsewhere, but um, unfortunately it coincided with the resignation of Sister Mary Ignatia, as she was then called [unclear] uh, it was unfortunate that both deans left at the same time but it was a coincidence, neither one of us knew that the other was planning to do that. So, then I did leave in

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1968 with the request to the community to have a sabbatical to refresh my history and then I expected to come back and teach at Mundelein. But, it didn't turn out that way. At that point, I was studying at the University of San Francisco and it was a very exciting time because during the uh, sixties, uh [unclear] on the continent of Africa, all of the, those countries were asserting themselves and becoming independent and throwing back the ropes of colonialism, so that I had a wonderful course at USF on the history of Africa and that was extremely new. I enjoyed my other courses as well, but that was very, very special and uh, it was an exciting time of course, and certainly in American educational circles it was very exciting,

and uh, I, I, think the, that was probably [unclear] ...which I wasn't here, [unclear] but there was a uh, activism, uh, among the student body [unclear]...and you have to ask some of people who were here in those days to describe it more fully, but uh, they were not about to be, uh, missed in the excitement in the student assertion, and it made its impact on all black college campuses at that time.

AA: What do remember back, uh, as your years of a faculty member and as a Dean that is perhaps your accomplishment as a mentor to the women?

MC:: I suppose it was, in many ways. Uh, they, I, I, made some good friends among those students so that uh, we had very few major disciplinary

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problems I must confess. One interesting thing occurred, I has a niece that was in school then at the same time, we tried very hard not to embarrass each other, and so sometimes I guess I was known as the 'Keen Dean', and at other times perhaps as the "Mean Dean" [Laughs] but she likes to rib me about some of the things that took place.

AA: How did Mundelein College relate to other women's colleges at that time?

MC: Well, now that's very interesting because I think most other colleges were going through many of the same experiences as we were going through, Rosary College in River Forest, uh, [unclear] up in Milwaukee um, there

very  
 the  
 were many, women's colleges were not unusual, today I think they are  
 unusual. Uh, but in our time, uh, my time I should say, there were a  
 number of very fine women' colleges, St. Xavier, the Mercy College on  
 South Side, and um, it was a year in which women's high schools even the  
 [unclear] boarding schools [unclear] uh were, were acceptable and  
 preferred in many cases. Today, uh, they are the exception, I think, really  
 an exception, and most of the women's colleges eventually became  
 coeducational. [unclear] I could go through a whole list of them. But, uh,  
 one great benefit, I think, in a women's college, uh, they did not have to  
 defer to any other student group, the girls did not have to defer to the boys,  
 uh, they were President, Vice President, Secretary and Treasurer, and, uh,

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they held all of those roles, and consequently, uh, I think they left us more  
 prepared to assume the tasks that they wanted to follow. But that,uh, that  
 was an experience, that on that first day in that era of feminism and so  
 forth, we look back and we say, we didn't use the term feminism, is wasn't  
 coined until much later but uh, the sympathies had come to its fruition.

But,

actually there was certainly a feminist atmosphere on campus because the  
 girls held every position there was nobody to stop them from being, the  
 top of the pile, shall I say, academically and uh it gave them a splendid

background that many of them have expressed their gratitude for. And today, of course I think they are learning to compete successfully, on campuses [unclear] and there are many instances you know that you point to, women athletes that kind of thing, they do quite well.

AA: Was there much interaction between them in these colleges? In the Chicago area, that you mentioned?

MC: That's a good question, um, probably not as much as there might be today, not that there was any design about it, but each was busy doing its own thing, and [unclear] since then I think we have begun to cooperate in a larger way on a larger scale [unclear] to do it that way, and so, uh, there was, I think we had friendly relationships with uh other colleges, women's

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colleges, and did participate sometimes in musical, sports, if there was something going on in the city, but, oh, there wasn't as much I think as there probably is today.

AA: I imagine there was competition for, for students.

MC: Oh, yes there was.

AA: And what, what did Mundelein do...to attract students...

MC: You mean the competition among the colleges...or...

AA: Right, to attract the students.

MC: Oh, to attract the students, indeed, that's always a question, and believe me it has not, uh, ceased today. Uh, that's very important. The admissions office really had to work very, very hard, and uh, a friend of mine who is still living, uh, today she is known as Sister Catherine [unclear], in that day she was Sister [unclear] Ida, and she became director of admissions, and she would go out to the different high school and persuade them that Mundelein College was the one that they would definitely want to attend. [Laughs] Occasionally, because at the beginning, you know, she always went to the parish, not [unclear] occasionally, I would have the happy fortune to go with her, and she did a fine job of getting enrollment.

AA: What was one of the advantages of Mundelein?

MC: The advantages, you mean as a women's college, or...

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AA: As a women's college.

MC: Oh, as a women's college...

AA: The location [unclear...]

MC: Well, I, I, well, the location was very good. Even today we benefit from the

uh, being good transportation as the CTA goes right uh, in front of our door the elevated, at least I call it, so uh, we had students come from the South Side, the West Side, and then eventually, as our Resident's

Department built up, we attracted them from farther and farther away, and that became exciting too, it really did.

[Pause]

AA: O.K., um, can you speak a little bit about the Second Vatican Council, and how it affected you?

MC: How it affected me? Oh, I should say I can, [Laughs]... it, it affected all of the sisterhoods, it really, really did. And, uh, there was a time when a very selective group within each religious congregation of women, would be elected to vote for the officers of the congregation and it was a secret vote, that is, they went off by themselves, and nobody ever knew what they, the results were, except in the final, who was elected, but you did not, were not keenly aware of, uh, the competition exactly. But, uh, you had these [unclear] leaders called were called (Chapters) it's an old medieval

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expression, so that within this (Chapter) you had, in the 1960's, was an open (Chapter) in the sense that it begins from the rank-and file, that attend and women from other communities that are invited to attend. Now that was a function, it really was a function. And it was very, very exciting. And then, [unclear...] the constitution was the [unclear] now, the constitution of any organized group of course, is basically very important. And, at least they had to meet with the approval of Rome. We had a



wonderful committee working on it but it took ten years of hard work, ten years before they came up with a constitution that was agreeable to all of us, and at the same time was agreeable to Rome. And that is still our constitution today. And then small things changed. I say small things, uh, taking off the religious habit was not considered small at the time. It was really a drastic change. You know, in the beginning if we had changed and modernized our habit at each ten years, it wouldn't have been quite as traumatic as it was when it formally came about in the mid-sixties. And, at first to many it was very upsetting, you know, they had every community had certain expectations. They had brought up and matured uh, following the same rules and regulations and then to have all of these changes

coming

at once [unclear] it was a great more of freedom for the individual. And one of the most, oh, historic area that's at that time even for among other religious women's communities was that we established a personnel

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commission which meant that the sisters could apply for jobs instead of being sent to jobs. And, uh, I, while I was studying at San Francisco, I was asked if I would become the first personnel professional. Well, fortunately there had been a committee, established to draw up a plan for a personnel commission, that is, a return to our [unclear] roots, an employment procedure, and so that when I stepped into the job, with a wonderful

assistant, Sister Catherine [ unclear ], we had been on the committee [ unclear ] and she became the associate uh, in the personnel department, and we had to go to Dubuque Iowa, to headquarters, but that was quite revolutionary. And, Sister Catherine and I, uh, we look back now and laugh, because we were among the first to attend this kind of event. So, we became sort of instant experts and we were invited to other religious communities to speak about it, you know, and of course up to that time uh, the priest of the parish was paramount in authority, if he didn't like certain sisters they were removed and if he wanted more sisters, the religious superiors tried to accommodate that request and now, they too were faced with the sisters choosing to go to this school or choosing to go to that school. Another major change came when sisters would choose ministries that were outside the teaching area. And that perhaps is one of the biggest changes because they had done wonderful, wonderful things, they had

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served as chaplains in women's prisons, they had worked as missionaries down in poorer sections of our country, and now in other countries too. We have a sister that used to be a theology teacher here, at the college, Sister Maryann [ unclear ] For a number of years now she has been in Africa training their black sisters in theology, in Africa. We have sister in Guatemala, we have sisters in Ecuador, and they can express a desire e to

do this kind of thing and they have done just a tremendous job in so many fields. On the other hand, uh, the changes in religious life are not about a number of people leaving the religious communities, of course, perhaps two, two factors were responsible. First of all, they all had more choices within the community but also outside the community, and secondly um,

...

[Stop tape]

and the second factor that caused them to leave was all of a sudden, the religious life was no longer what they had experienced in the previous time.

And, therefore they were disappointed and disillusioned for various reasons

so in the late-sixties and seventies all religious communities experiences a certain exodus, they really did. And that is [ unclear ] For one thing, uh, lay

women went out to do many of the things the sisters used to do. Lay women would also take part in, for instance in the Institute of Pastoral Studies, at Loyola University, that is not exclusively for religious, as such.

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So they did alot to make it attractive to do many of the things that the nuns did, previously. So there was a great force, uh, a great upheaval shall I say, particularly in the late sixties, and the uh, early seventies. For the most part,

I think, you don't find too many women today, in fact, we are attracting older women. In the old days, the average sister entered the community after high school while some of them, uh, had their degree before they entered, or had working experience before they entered, but I'd say the average girl, entered after high school. Today [ unclear ] to our communities, uh, who have chosen to come because they feel that they have a gift to give, and they see themselves being able to give that gift, and to proceed along lines that before might have been closed to them. But other vocations that come in to our community are much, much smaller, not just ours. I think its just universal, there's a shortage of priests [ unclear ] a question for the Catholic Church, uh, because in celibacy is not required of a priest until after [ unclear ] whereas the [ unclear ] So celibacy is [ unclear ] and then, also, [unclear] they had found greater freedom to work in many areas outside the [unclear] ordained clergy. And then of course, the big major question, exclusive question, is the

ordination

of women. And, I will never forget, one of our sisters, one of our community sisters [ unclear ] who took all of the work that is required to

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be ordained, and then she went with another sister to ask permission, and of course it was refused, refused, she has done a tremendous piece of

she's work, uh, within her community, she is still working there, [ unclear ]  
 doing a tremendous job, but [ unclear ] to become an ordained priest  
 [ unclear ] and anyways I feel we have greater freedom. As the modern  
 women, as the modern sisters, we have many choices that sometimes the  
 ordained clergy do not have. But on the other hand I do not feel a call to be  
 an ordained [ unclear ] but I, these are some of the questions that rise to in  
 and about the church today.

AA: How do you feel about women being ordained, personally?

MC: Well, I, I, really, I see many of our sisters doing the work of ordained  
 clergy, without the privilege of offering mass. We have had sisters,  
 particularly in the western states in Montana for one, they were doing the  
 job of administering the churches, in these vast areas. Sisters had charge of  
 something like five parishes and uh, they were doing the administrative  
 work, and some of them are doing the administrative work today but in the  
 last instance, the celebration of the Eucharist, an ordained clergyman must  
 be brought in. I don't think it will come in my lifetime, but I do think it  
 will come. Also a married clergy, I think that will come.

AA: Perhaps more people will be called to...

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MC: Oh, I know some fabulous priests who are devout men, who are doing

good work, and yet, because they have married, they are denied the right to celebrate mass and perform the sacraments, administer the sacraments, so um, I, I, have met a number of former priests who would be wonderful if they were allowed to officiate but as yet, that is still not possible.

AA: Well, in addition to all of your other accomplishments, um, in the mid-seventies, if I'm right, you became involved in a federal agency volunteer program, called ACTION...

MC: Yes, I did.

AA: How did you become involved in that?

MC: Well, that is interesting, it was when I was living in Dubuque, and first of all, you need permission, and I lived with a group of women there in the city of Dubuque, it was a new chapter of the American Association of University Women and many of my friends belonged to it, and then we became friends, Morris College which is a diocesan college in Dubuque had received a Title III grant to provide a program for the elderly and I knew the women who were in charge of the program and then in the summertime, when our sisters were placed, she asked me to assist in developing a placement service for older women looking for part-time work, in which I was glad to help her with. So I became aware of the needs

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of the elderly and I also had when I finished my term of office as a

personnel commissioner, I had expected to come back here to Mundelein, and go on teaching history. But there wasn't an opening and, this rarely happened, so, I looked around for something else to do and the government at that time wanted to start a program under an agency that was called ACTION, The Older American Volunteer Program, and they were looking for people to act in each state and to sell these programs to the local people and a new program that they had was called RSVP, Retired Single Volunteer Program. So, I always kid about being a Sagittarian, I'll try anything once, I'm inclined to take a risk, so since I'm at a job where I can risk, I applied to become trained as one of the people to sell this program. And I was [ unclear ] So, I was accepted, and then, we were brought again up to a place in Wisconsin, and given a week's training after which we were supposed to be perfect specialists. Then we went back to the areas where we lived, and I was living at Clark College

at

that time, and one would go out to the agencies within cities and family services, that kind of thing, and you could give your pitch and an explanation of the program, and in the end, we had sixteen programs [ unclear ] and then the federal agency which had its unit down in Kansas City, is the head of seventy-five regions, the center, they established a

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federal office in different states to administer actions [ unclear ] So, Des

Moines, Iowa, I was living in Dubuque, but Des Moines, Iowa, became a subject of the program in Iowa, so I applied and was accepted there, and went around Iowa to all kind of places and then at that point I had to get a car, of course and for a while I was able to take a group of our sisters there. and after I did that for about three or four years, [unclear] learning the highways in Iowa, I looked at the Washington scene, where the headquarters were in Washington, and over the wires so to speak, an opening was listed at the Washington office, so I applied for it and I, was, was accepted. So after I traveled all by myself, riding in my car, seven-hundred fifty miles, to Washington, DC, and I was there as a [unclear] officer for over three years, and I really enjoyed it very, very much. I had a little furnished apartment while I was in Virginia,

[end tape one]

[begin tape two, side one]

I remained in Washington for three years. and I found that I had had a very valuable experience, I really did, I learned a great deal about gerontology, which is good for [unclear] but I was getting on in age, shall I say, and I thought I could stop working quite so hard, so in 1980 I made plans to resign and to come back to the Midwest, and I received a sabbatical from

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I the community for a year in which I would just look around, and see what  
wanted to do next. So I asked to live here at Mundelein and it was  
accepted, and at that time, uh, there was a a, professor who was very  
interesting and who was establishing a center on aging, not so much to  
deliver service, to older people, but to deliver education about the aging  
process to everybody else, so we approached, I believe Sister Sue, I  
believe  
[ unclear ] but she was very agreeable except I had to raise my own money,  
it wasn't in the budget, so ever the optimist, I said alright, I'll try it. I fell  
heir to very lovely office over in what we used to call the "Yellow House"  
and other programs were [ unclear ] out there, and [ unclear ] and for five  
years I was able to handle it, to do it, and we had some very interesting  
programs. But at that time the administration changed in Washington and  
funding became tighter and also we had a different president come in, a  
man, and we had not had a man president before, and he had different  
ideas  
than we, wanted, he did not want the "Yellow House" and my office to be  
used in that capacity, so I lost my wonderful office, and was dedicated to  
the [ unclear ] and what it called the learning resource center, Sullivan  
Center, and it would be impossible to operate without [ unclear ] shall I  
say. In the meantime, Sister [ unclear ] pardon me, Sister Mary  
[ unclear ] became President, and she heard about the Elderhostel

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Program, and I was interested in that too, and she also made a it possible to start one here, so I made all the necessary connections, between here and Boston, so for five summers, we had mostly two programs each summer. That program, the Elderhostel Program, is doing very, very well today. It's for people fifty-five and older who would like some intellectual stimulation, but they do not want to bother with term papers and assignments and degrees so they would come in to our college campus, at the beginning [ unclear ] they usually were offered three classes and then the college of course, or university [ unclear ] so we had an excellent program here, I was able to persuade some of our faculty because they would be paid for it, not a magnificent sum, but they would receive a salary, and they enjoyed the older person, who was there simply because they were interested, there was no other ulterior motive for distraction, and they found it very rewarding, and I was able to coax some of them [ unclear ] and we had some pretty interesting experiences. And then we could use the resources of Illinois, I remember Northwestern University had a series of free concerts, that [ unclear ] so for a couple of summers we did that uh, we became very interested in a man connected with the Frank Lloyd Wright foundation in Oak Park, an intellectual and a very fine speaker.

[stop tape]  
Cramer

One of the most popular speakers we had was a man named (Lyman Shepard), and Lyman Shepard is associated with the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, in Oak Park, so it always consisted of his initial lecture which was very dramatic. He would come in dressed as Frank Lloyd Wright, with a big black swirling cape, and a soft velvet pork pie hat, and he'd say, I am Frank Lloyd Wright and he'd [ unclear ] and then he would take us on a trip out to Oak Park, and, uh, he was a delight. But all of the faculty who affiliated contributed to the program made it very worthwhile. And then we in ninety-one with Loyola I don't think they were particularly concerned with the Elderhostel Program, [ unclear ] and I was wearing out, too [ unclear ] I have tried in the eighties and the nineties since I have come back, uh, to become involved in my local community, and so I was a member of the Edgewater Community Council in the eighties, and I'm also a became a member on the board, and I became a board member of the North Lakeside Culture Center, and that's the [ unclear ] I've stayed about six years on all of those, and then finally the celebration of the centennial of Edgewater which was a stunning success for the Edgewater Community Council. The, uh, all the material we gathered we lost and certainly with all

the women helping me, on that program and Kathy [ unclear ] who is a graduate from Mundelein, started the Edgewater Historical Society and it

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has been going very strong ever since, and today, like I say, my most exciting project is with Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly, and I'll try to be very brief in summing that up. Way back in the late fifties, Sister [ unclear ] Irene [ unclear ] was chairperson of the French Department here at, and she went over to Paris and met Armand [ unclear ] and he was a young aristocrat who had survived World War II and was very concerned about the fate of the elderly, so many of their families had been desimated and he was very concerned and he started a quasi-religious group called Little Brothers of the Poor to minister to the elderly and he wanted to come to the United States and Sister [ unclear ] said why don't you come to Chicago, and he did. And so today, there are seven different communities around the country that call themselves Little Bothers, Friends of the Elderly, but the largest in here in Chicago it has one of our graduates, Tina [ unclear ] and she is one of the best administrators I have ever worked with, she is just fabulous. So I am on the board of directors of Little Brothers, Friends of the Elderly and that gives me great pleasure, it really does. So, at the age of eighty-five, this is uh, [Laughs] we've covered a lot of ground [Laughs]

AA: You've written that the older person is a giver, not a receiver of services...

MC: Well, the older person should be. We all are are vulnerable and we all are

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are

federal

going

going to become dependent eventually, uh, but on the other hand, we have something to give, too and sometimes, I think the kind of thing that you

doing, calling on people to record their memories is one of the ways in which older people can contribute and there are many ways in which they can contribute and I have seen that happen, one of the programs that I was associated with, Foster Grandparent Program, older people helping little children and I'm also on the advisory council of that, still that same

agency I worked for in Washington, but its a separate program, its called Senior Companions and this is a program run locally run by the Chicago Department on Aging where older people usually of low income receive a small stipend and pocket money and they'll spend twenty-hours a week [ unclear ] and usually its organized, so that they know where they're

to, but they do a tremendous job and so many elderly people would remain out of institutions if they just had a little boost, a little help, going to the store for for one, for instance, taking them to the doctor, that kind of thing, so, um I have become very involved in those two programs, and I still am, so anyhow I don't have a lot of time in which to get bored [Laughs]

AA: It doesn't look like it. Um, you had a very successful career as a teacher, an instructor, a dean, and then your government agency that you worked with. How do you see, um a relationship between such a full professional life and your religious life?

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MC: Well, in religious orders, there is the group that we call contemplative, where they are primarily interested in developing a rich prayer life and praying for the rest of the world, prayer is their main objective. And typically in the nineteenth century, although it did not start then, there was a need to be met, and when the five sisters who started our community, they were five young women, they came from Ireland in 1833, and started in Philadelphia. There was a whole immigrant population in this country at that time and Catholics were in the minority, and economically at the bottom of the heap. So with that there was a group to be accomplished and I think [ unclear ] and that group to be accomplished can translate itself in many ways . They use whatever talents you have and are awfully good [ unclear ] You need to help others to help society, and I think that in itself is a very strong vocation.

AA: You wrote too, that each decade has its own concerns. From the forties, and World War II to the sixties and seventies with civil rights and Vietnam.

As this decade is coming to a close what do you see as important concerns for both women students, and women religious?

MC: [ unclear ]

AA: In this decade... [ unclear ]

MC: Oh, in the nineties.

Cramer

AA: In the nineties and...

MC: And looking ahead.

AA: Exactly.

MC: This will tell you, in the midst of so many experts you know [ unclear ] we have seen a lot of individualism and there is a need to see the needs of other

people and yet at the same time I have am simply amazed at the number of not-for-profit organizations, and that's the kind that I belonged to when I worked, not-for profit organizations that are administering to others. For instance in the Board of Directors of Little Brothers, most of the board members happen to be women and their [ unclear ] their accomplishments their willingness to serve, uh, their talents, I, I have simply found amazing and wonderful and I think in the twentieth-century perhaps women will

still

be trying to get through the glass ceiling which seems to be ever-present [ unclear ] but at the same time I think women have freed themselves and will continue to do so not that all the social problems are going to be

dissolved. When you read the daily newspaper, the same, the same, what shall say, inequities, the same fears and hatreds that are among peoples throughout the world, which resulted in wars and still persist, and that is one of the saddest things, and I think that violence, there used as a solution, is, is very sad. [ unclear ] but peace has to come as a result of

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[ unclear ] the problems are still buried, I'm afraid to say, see there's plenty of work to be done.

AA: Thank you very much.

MC: Thank you, Angela.