News
Religious Life



Women Religious Archives Collaborative leaders and sisters from member congregations ceremonially break ground July 22, 2025, on the nonprofit’s project to build a center to house the archives for up to 75 congregations of Catholic sisters. (Courtesy of Women Religious Archives Collaborative)



by Dan Stockman

View Author Profile
dstockman@ncronline.org

Join the Conversation

January 7, 2026

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

The collaborative archive for congregations of Catholic sisters currently under construction in Cleveland has received a major boost in funding.

The Women Religious Archives Collaborative received a $4.7 million grant from Lilly Endowment Inc., officials announced Dec. 15.

The grant will fund a five-year project, "So The Stories Can Be Told," which will draw from the histories within sisters' archives to connect a diverse, multigenerational audience with the stories of Catholic sisters. It will use multimedia in-person and online exhibits, storytelling programs and a research fellowship.

"This generous grant will amplify our mission to preserve and share the histories of Catholic sisters in the United States by supporting the processing of archival collections, identification of compelling stories within them, and the sharing of these stories in relatable and engaging ways," said archives collaborative executive director Sr. Susan Durkin, a Cleveland Ursuline, in a statement announcing the grant.



The construction site for the Women Religious Archives Collaborative's Heritage Center is seen in August just outside downtown Cleveland, Ohio. (Courtesy of Women Religious Archives Collaborative)

"Through this storytelling project, current and future generations will be able to learn from the stories of women religious about the role of faith and service, women's leadership, and the power of community to make meaningful change to better our world," Durkin said.

The Women Religious Archives Collaborative broke ground in July on a 30,000-square-foot Heritage Center, which will house a 16,000-square-foot, temperature-controlled, fire-suppressing archival vault to store congregations' archival collections.

The nonprofit was founded in 2022 by a collaboration of Catholic sisters in response to a growing need to plan for the future of their archives. The Heritage Center is set to open in Cleveland, Ohio, in 2027 to house collections from over 75 congregations and share the history of Catholic sisters through research, exhibits and

programming. At least 44 congregations to date have committed their collections.



Medals and relics from member congregations are displayed July 22, 2025, before being buried under the new Women Religious Archives Collaborative's Heritage Center, under construction in Cleveland, Ohio. (Courtesy of Women Religious Archives Collaborative)

The Archives Collaborative has almost completed its $24 million capital campaign, and has begun a campaign to fund a $15 million endowment to fund operations.

According to a study conducted in 2022 by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate, nearly half of congregations in the study do not have a long-term plan for their archival collections, and nearly 40% need to relocate their archives in the next decade.

The grant is through Lilly Endowment's National Storytelling Initiative on Christian Faith and Life, which helps organizations identify, produce and share compelling stories that portray the vibrancy and hope of Christian faith and life. The

collaborative is one of 60 U.S. organizations that have received grants through the initiative since 2024.



New movable shelves in the archives of the Dominican Sisters of Peace will allow a much more efficient storage of records. (Courtesy of the Dominican Sisters of Peace)

Major archive improvements

Meanwhile, the Dominican Sisters of Peace in Columbus, Ohio, are celebrating the total renovation of its archival department.

The biggest part of the renovation was the installation of movable shelving; the congregation's more than 200 years' worth of records had been stored in boxes stacked on the floor.

"To say I'm ecstatic would not be an understatement," archivist Michelle Ganz said in a statement announcing the completion of the project. "Having comprehensive information about the sisters is one of the most important functions of the archives. The shelving provides a more orderly process for storing the information that we collect."

The project allows the digitization of records and a more efficient method for cataloging photos; the archives are also home to the congregation's collection of sisters' oral histories.

Advertisement