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Title

Charlotte Doclar Oral History Interview and Transcript

Date

May 20, 2005

Extant

50 minutes interview (two files) and 1 transcript

Abstract

In this oral history, Charlotte Doclar, former School Sister of Notre Dame, discusses her work at New Ways Ministry, her involvement in the original Conference of Catholic Lesbians in 1980, leaving her order in 1981, and later contributing her story to *Lesbian Nuns Breaking Silence*.

Biographical

Charlotte Doclar was born in New Orleans on April 2, 1934. She attended the School of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on Canal Street, operated by the School Sisters of Notre Dame (SSND) for all twelve grades and graduated in 1952 at age 18. While not especially devout, in 1954, she decided to pursue a vocation and entered the novitiate at the School Sisters of Notre Dame motherhouse in St. Louis.

After her noviate, she taught in San Antonio in the Dallas Province. Despite regulations against "particular friendships," Charlotte had what she termed "affairs" with other nuns and lay women. The word "lesbian" was never used by convent officials or the nuns. When in her thirties in San Antonio, she became aware of feminism and lesbianism and recognized her own lesbian identity. She came out to her Mother Superior who later notified Charlotte about a retreat for lesbian nuns. This was the first retreat for lesbian nuns organized by Jeannine Gramick of New Ways Ministries. Charlotte's Mother Superior made it possible for Charlotte to attend the weekend conference without disclosing the reason or her sexual identity to the other nuns in the convent. Charlotte never experienced any persecution for her lesbianism while in the convent.

Charlotte attended this highly secretive retreat in Hyattsville, Maryland, in late 1970s with four other lesbian nuns. Afterwards, Charlotte drafted a proposal to her provincial order, requesting a year off to work with Jeannine Gramick in Washington, D.C. The convent agreed, and supported Charlotte in 1980s while she worked for New Way Ministries. Charlotte expected that when the year was over, she would return to her province to act as a resource for other lesbian nuns, but no nuns ever approached her regarding their sexual identity. Having lived openly as a lesbian outside of the convent, she found it hypocritical to hide her lesbian identity behind the convent walls. She left the order in 1981.

Charlotte remained in contact with other nuns who had left the SSND order. She attended a conference that Jeannine Gramick and New Ways Ministry organized for Catholic lesbians-lay women and nuns-at Yardley, Pennsylvania. It was at this conference that lay Catholics Karen Doherty and Christine Nusse conceived of an organization for Catholic lesbians. Charlotte subsequently attended the first conference of the Conference for Catholic Lesbians (CCL) at Kirkridge Conference Center in Pennsylvania and later CCL conferences around the country. Charlotte Doclar's story became known in 1985, when Nancy Manahan and Rosemary Curb published their interview with Charlotte in their book *Lesbian Nuns: Breaking the Silence*. Soon after the book was released, the publisher, Naiad Press, sold the rights to this interview to *MS* magazine which published it in August 1985. (Naiad sold other stories from the book to the men's magazine, *Forum*.)

After leaving the convent, Charlotte taught in Houston public schools from 1981 until her retirement in 2000. She joined the Unitarian Universalist Church in Houston, and was a vital member of that church community. She died in her home in Houston on September 7, 2012.

Arden Eversmeyer was a Houston activist. She founded Lesbians Over Age Fifty (LOAF) and the [Old Lesbian Oral Herstory Project \(OLOHP\)](#) in an effort to document and honor those life stories. Arden personally interviewed over 200 older lesbians and co-edited two anthologies, *A Gift of Age* (2009) and *Without Apology* (2012), which contain excerpts from the collected interviews.

Scope and Content

In this oral history, Charlotte Doclar reflects on her time as a School Sister of Notre Dame, and her work with New Ways Ministry. She attended a retreat for lesbian nuns which was organized by Jeannine Grammick, and shortly after went to work as an intern at New Ways Ministry. She discusses her involvement in the original Conference of Catholic Lesbians in Yarley, Pennsylvania, in 1980, leaving the convent in 1981, and later contributing her story to *Lesbian Nuns Breaking Silence*.

Access

Open to all researchers.

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/oral-histories/charlotte-doclar>

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Languages

Collection material is in English

Custodial History

This tape was given to LGBTQ-RAN archives by Charlotte Doclar and Arden Eversmeyer.

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Tags

Catholic (Roman)

Doherty, Karen

Gramick, Jeannine

Conference of Catholic Lesbians

New Ways Ministry

Women and Religion

Doclar, Charlotte