

Elizabeth Thoman

June 18, 1943 – December 22, 2016

Sister Elizabeth Thoman, CHM, died December 22, 2016 at Bishop Drumm Retirement Center in Johnston, Iowa. Elizabeth Jeanne Thoman was born to John Arthur and Gertrude Roberson and grew up in Nashville, Tennessee. She entered the Congregation of the Humility of Mary in 1964, professing vows in 1966. She graduated with a B.A. from Marycrest College and earned a Masters degree from the University of Southern California, Annenberg School of Communications and also from Immaculate Heart College in Los Angeles.

Liz Thoman spent her life advocating for media literacy education, helping to advance the growth of the national media literacy movement in the United States. She began her career teaching English at Linehan High School in Marshalltown, Iowa from 1967 -1969 where she developed an interest in communication education. From 1970 - 1975, she served as staff photographer for the Franciscan Communications Center where she helped make short films designed to promote classroom discussion in religious education. To advance the communications ministry, Liz founded and led the National Sisters Communications Service in Los Angeles from 1975 to 1983. This network provided professional communication resources for women religious communities nationwide. Communications was seen as the key to changing the traditional public image of nuns and helping people understand and value the sisters' new roles in a variety of ministries. It was through this work that Liz met Norman Lear, a television producer who created "All in the Family," who sought her advice on a television show that would feature the changing roles of Catholic nuns.

When Elizabeth Thoman founded *Media&Values Magazine* in 1977, it was an extension of a class project that she developed as a student at USC, working under Professor Richard Byrne. The magazine was imagined as one that would "explore the values questions raised by the transition from the Industrial Age to the coming Information Age." Working solo and later with a talented editorial team, the magazine ran for 16 years (63 issues), tackling such issues as media and war, gender stereotypes and racism in the media, media regulation, children and media and more. The magazine featured short articles which translated key ideas from current academic research and communication policy to inform a general readership including parents and teachers. As circulation reached 10,000, Liz was motivated to create the Center for Media Literacy in 1989, developing a website and creating curriculum materials including "Beyond Blame: Challenging Violence in the Media," which offered lesson plans, video clips and readings designed to help students of all ages develop critical thinking skills in responding to media violence.

Known as an articulate and passionate speaker, Elizabeth Thoman testified before Congress and was one of 50 media and educational leaders in the U.S. invited by President and Mrs. Clinton to the White House Summit on Children's Television. She has keynoted conferences in the US and Canada, including the National Association for Science, Technology and Society, National Catholic Educational Association, Kentucky School Boards Association, the Southern California Psychiatric Society and others. She presented hundreds of media literacy trainings and workshops to educators and parents in more than 25 states. Elizabeth Thoman was frequently asked to comment on issues related to children, media and education, and was interviewed by Bill Moyers for Frontline, *NBC Nightly News*, *National Public Radio*, *CNN*, *Time*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *National Catholic Reporter*, Associated Press, The Today Show, *Washington Post* and the *Wall Street Journal* among others.

When Liz attended a Canadian media literacy conference in Guelph, Ontario and a UNESCO sponsored-conference on media education in Toulouse, France in 1989, she was inspired to help coordinate

American educators at the national level to advance the development of a media literacy movement. She worked with Charles Firestone of the Aspen Institute to develop the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, which was held in 1992. At this meeting, the definition of media literacy was established as the “ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a wide variety of forms.”

After hosting a successful media literacy conference in Los Angeles in 1996, Elizabeth Thoman co-founded the Partnership for Media Education to promote continued professional development in the field. In 2001 PME evolved into the Alliance for a Media Literate America (AMLA), which was renamed the National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) as the official membership organization for the field, with over 3,500 members as of 2016.

Elizabeth Thoman received a number of awards and recognition for her leading role in media literacy education. In 2003, Thoman received the Daniel J. Kane Lifetime Achievement Award from the University of Dayton, Ohio. In 2006, Liz received the “Leaders in Learning Award” from the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) and Cable in the Classroom in Washington, D.C. to honor a lifetime of leadership in media literacy education. Her alma mater, Marycrest International University, honored her in 1990 with the Henderson Medal in recognition of her outstanding contributions to the field of education.

Upon her retirement, Liz continued to develop her skills as a professional photographer by establishing Healing Petals, a collection of unique photographs to stimulate meditation, reflection and prayer in a process that is grounded in feminist spirituality, Buddhist philosophy, Christian theology and holistic health. In 2010, Saint Thomas Hospital in Nashville, Tennessee, commissioned a collection of her photographs to be installed in each of nearly 300 patient rooms.

Elizabeth Thoman was a member of the Congregation of the Humility of Mary, a contemporary religious community which welcomed Liz's mission to bring media literacy to the world. After retirement to Humility of Mary Center in 2013, she served in the CHM Membership Development office. She moved to Bishop Drumm in 2016 where she remained until her death. She is survived by brothers James, Lawrence (Beth) and John Jr., sisters Patricia Young and Mary Lynn Thoman, as well as nieces, nephews and members of her religious community. She was preceded in death by her parents.

Services at Bishop Drumm’s Our Lady of Peace Chapel in Johnston, Iowa will be held 4 pm, Monday, December 26. Services at the Humility of Mary Center in Davenport will be held on Tuesday, December 27, with Rosary-Visitation at 4 pm and Vigil at 7 pm. The funeral mass will be held on December 28 at 11:00 am, with burial following at Mt. Calvary Cemetery.

Memorials may be made to the Congregation of the Humility of Mary, 820 W Central Park Ave, Davenport, IA 52804.