



ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC DIOCESAN ARCHIVISTS

“Committed to the active promotion of professionalism in the management of diocesan archives.”

www.diocesanarchivists.org

OPEN LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Dear Editor,

I was glad to see the published results of Youngok Choi and Emil Nilson’s study, “The Current Status of Catholic Archives,” in the 2019 Spring/Summer edition of *The American Archivist*. As the president of the Association of Catholic Diocesan Archivists (ACDA), I was particularly interested in their analysis and proposed solutions to areas requiring development within Catholic archives. Choi and Nilson’s identification of staff shortages and lack of financial support is all too apparent to our membership. Their quantification of the same supports our perpetual argument for more access to resources. However, I would like to draw attention to two shortcomings of the article, which I believe skews the study’s results.

First, the authors made the statement, “US Catholic archival institutions are focusing on promoting scholarly and public understanding of records of the documentary and artifactual heritage of American Catholic culture and history.” That statement shows a generalized misunderstanding of Catholic diocesan and religious structures in which Catholic archives and records management programs are situated. A few diocesan and religious programs operate as a department within a college or seminary, usually as a function of a university library. Most programs, however, function as a diocesan department and operate as non-profit, corporate archives. Each repository and parent organization have unique missions and goals. I realize that such distinctions can be easily dismissed as trivial. But having worked in the American Catholic Church for 15 years, I can attest that the differences are significant and imperative to delineate in a peer-reviewed, academic publication. I suggest that the article would have provided more applicable and actionable results if the analysis included a more discrete definition of “Catholic archives.”

Second, the authors’ proposed solutions of leadership, collaboration, ongoing discussion among peers, and sharing of best practices likely strikes most readers as clear and practical. ACDA could not agree more, which is why our stated mission is, “to promote education and training programs to support our colleagues; to offer professional networking; to promote cooperation between professionals at the diocesan, local, national, and international level and represent Catholic diocesan archivists’ in those venues; and to articulate the value and necessity of diocesan archives and records management programs.” While our membership does not publish articles as regularly as an academic



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might, we are actively advocating for diocesan records through speaking engagements or workshops at the usual professional venues of SAA, regional archival associations, ARMA International (at the chapter and international level), International Council of Archives, and ACDA's own biennial conference. Within the past 10 years, members have also presented at interdisciplinary conferences such as the Canon Law Society of America's Convention, the conference of the National Diocesan Attorneys Association, the Conference for Catholic Facility Management, the Diocesan Information Systems Conference, the American Catholic Historical Association, and *Envisioning the Future of Religious Archives Conference* in 2018. In 2012, ACDA published *Managing Diocesan Archives and Records: A Guide for Bishops, Chancellors, and Archivists*. This peer reviewed guide was written by Dr. Emilie G. Leumas, PhD, CA, CRM, Audrey P. Newcomer, CA, and John J. Treanor, CA, CRM, all well-known professionals in the field. This manual was published 25 years after ACDA's first *Basic Standards for Diocesan Archives* by James O'Toole, and is available for purchase on ACDA's website. While I agree that, as professionals, we can always do more to educate and promote Catholic archives, I think that Choi and Nilson's study missed the mark by limiting examination to professional literature, excluding professional speaking engagements, while overlooking some major recent publications. That method convoluted the results by implying a very limited format and venue for advocacy.

Motivated in part by Choi and Nilson's article, ACDA's planning committee has proposed a more in depth study of diocesan archives and records management programs. We hope this will more clearly describe the state of diocesan archives and give ACDA a direction to support future development of the profession. We look forward to formally publishing those results to see how well they fit within Choi and Nilson's general study of Catholic archives.

Respectfully,

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