

Abstract

What do we do with the archives?

In this paper, I discuss the options for embracing the future of religious archives for institutions facing closure, with a focus on Roman Catholic archives.¹ Through a survey undertaken in March 2020, a review of websites, discussions with archivists, and dialogue at a conference for Roman Catholic religious archives at Boston College in 2018, I found that there are three main options. These approaches involve consolidation, transfer to another repository through donation or permanent loan, and creating a collaborative archives space. I discuss the associated benefits and drawbacks with these various approaches, including issues of copyright, privacy, appraisal, variation in cataloguing, access, and the management of records still being created. I also review the key recommendations of the working paper published after the Boston conference, and what religious archivists are doing in the present in terms of these recommendations. My research shows that Roman Catholic archivists are concerned about the future, are working to promote archival access, and are highly involved in professional activity on the future disposition of religious archives.

Background

As Choi and Nilson (2019) note, the Pew Research Center reports that the number of Americans who identify as Christians dropped from 78.4% in 2007 to 70.6% in 2014, while the percentage of Americans without a religious affiliation increased from 16.1% to 22.8% over the same period. A similar trend is shown in Roman Catholic communities of men and women religious across the world, who have faced decreasing numbers since Vatican II. As members age, and congregations and parishes diminish in number, more convents, monasteries, and churches close, and the disposition of religious archives becomes a more pressing problem. A conference attended by religious leaders, archivists, and historians at Boston College in 2018, identified basically two choices for disposition of archives as membership in religious institutions declines: consolidation or transfer. Either choice has associated benefits and drawbacks, all of which must be carefully considered, including issues of copyright, privacy, appraisal, variation in cataloguing, access, and the management of records still being created.

This is a summary of research conducted from March to May 2020, including reviews of websites, interviews and correspondence, and a survey of religious archivists in North America.ⁱⁱ Key findings of the working paper published after the Boston conference are reviewed in the summary.

Boston College conference

The Boston College conference, “Envisioning the Future of Catholic Archives,” was held in 2018. Over 165 Catholic religious leaders, archivists and historians were in attendance. These groups were identified because each group has a stake in the preservation of these materials. Congregations create history, archives preserve and keep history, and historians use the archives to make history accessible. Conference attendees discussed what to do with archives as large numbers of religious communities are nearing completion. Roman Catholic women religious are experiencing a transformative change – there has been a 75% decline in the number of Sisters in USA since the height in 1966 with the median age being 70.

Ignorance of archival management has led to the loss of records because some religious leaders are worried about confidentiality and loss of control. Many people noted that religious

institutions may write themselves out of history if their archives are not more open. Sister Ginger Downey, Our Lady of Victory Missionary Sisters, asked, “what are you afraid of? Does it change the narrative? Does it undo the good that was done?” She said, “save your stuff!” She said the truth must win out. History will be written anyway, but you may not be here to be part of the process – so the archives must be there to tell your story. Sister Patricia Wittberg, Sister of Charity of Cincinnati, noted that if women religious do not tell their stories, they lose control – all too often the media distorts the message of religious institutions. As a result, the next generation receive a negative context which compromises Catholicism’s positive contributions. This was echoed by Sister Jean Bartunek, Society of the Sacred Heart, who held that what is taken as real is what people take the energy to preserve.

Planning for the future

Since the Boston College conference, I was curious about how religious organizations with declining numbers, regardless of religious denomination, were facing the challenge of the future disposition of their archives. I prepared a survey concerning the future of religious archives which was sent out in the early spring of 2020, and not restricted to any particular religious affiliation, believing that this could gather useful information for all religious archivists, although my focus is on Roman Catholic archives. Besides the archives of religious communities, I was also interested in religious archives at other institutions.

Half of the respondents were archivists for communities of women religious (55.04%) with a lower number representing communities of men religious (17.05%). Other respondents were from a variety of religious settings including diocesan or archdiocesan archives (6.98%), local, national, or international church organizations (6.21%), a national federation (1.55%), and a theological school (1.55%). The remainder (11.63%) identified affiliation with an archeparchy, church, synagogue, a lay community, a private parachurch ministry, or a college, university, or public repository. Two respondents identified as consultants. Slightly over half of the archivists surveyed had begun or completed a plan for the future disposition of their archives (56.59%),ⁱⁱⁱ

Of those who had decided on an approach, the majority (44.19%) had chosen to consolidate their archives in one location. Over half of the respondents felt that their institutions were neutral

about moving the archives to a different location (58%). This was the result of a Likert scale question where 0 was very unhappy, 50 was neutral, and 100 was very accepting. More respondents (22.48%) felt it would take five to seven years to complete processing their archives in order to consolidate or donate the archives, compared to 11.63% who felt it would take one to two years, or 14.73% who felt it would take more than ten years.

My research shows that there are four major choices of repository that have been selected when a religious organization's membership declines: a consolidated institutional archives; a public repository such as a university, city, provincial, or county archives; a diocesan archives; or a collaborative archives, such as a regional archives centre. ^{iv}

Charism-based consolidation

A total of 38.76% of survey respondents indicated that they were in the process of, or had completed, consolidating their archives.

Examples: consolidation

The Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada was formed through the amalgamation of four separate congregations in 2012. The archives hold the consolidated archives of the formerly separate congregations in Hamilton, London, and Pembroke, with plans to add the Peterborough archives in the future. The congregation undertook a detailed needs assessment of their archives in 2013, shortly after amalgamation. The plan was to:

- Set up a new main archive for the records created by the amalgamated congregation which would collect records created after 2012
- Keep the original archives of each formerly separate congregation open
- Follow the recommendations in the needs assessment to apply professional standards to the archive collections
- When the time came to close a convent, move the archives to the consolidated archives, but keep each archive physically and intellectually separate.

Taking a similar approach, the congregational archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Cleveland, Ohio, created an archive in 2007 which housed the records of seven individual congregations.

Carondelet, another branch of the Sisters of St. Joseph charism, consolidated their provincial archives in one location, bringing together the archives from Albany, Los Angeles and Hawaii in St. Louis, Missouri. The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary Motherhouse in Longueuil, Québec holds the archives of the Sisters of the Holy Name of Jesus and Mary Ontario Province and Quebec Province. The *Jesuit Archives and Research Center* in St. Louis, Missouri holds the archives of fourteen provinces: Buffalo, California, Central and Southern, Chicago, Chicago-Detroit, Detroit, Midwest, Missouri, New England, New Orleans, New York, Northeast, Oregon, and Wisconsin. The archive also keeps the records of the Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States.

The *Deschâtelets-NDC Archives* (The Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Notre Dame du Cap Province), provide a different approach where religious records were consolidated and held under OMI sponsorship. This archive holds the Deschâtelets collection of historical materials related to the Oblates from across Canada and the provincial archives of Notre-Dame du Cap (NDC). The archives also hold the archive of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St. Peter's Province. There was no transfer of ownership by OMI Lacombe Canada.^v

Academic institutions offer another option for consolidation by providing space to a free-standing archival operation. Originally, the Society of Mary (Marianists) had five American provinces: the original American province, as well as the Pacific, New York, Cincinnati, and St. Louis provinces. Over time, the St. Louis province archive moved to San Antonio, Texas, while the other provincial archives were relocated to the University of Dayton in Ohio, where the Cincinnati province archive was also kept. Eventually, after amalgamation of the provinces in 2002, the archives were consolidated as the *National Archives of the Marianist Province of the United States*, in San Antonio. A building was purchased and leased for 50 years from St. Mary's University. The archive has 10,200 square feet in two facilities with an HVAC system, mobile shelving, map cabinets, a museum exhibit space, a reading room, and two professional archivists as well as two Marianist brothers on staff. Its location on the University campus assures its connection with an educational institution which has an interest in the religious community.

The establishment of a non-profit organization to manage the archive affords another example of consolidation. The *Monastère des Augustines Archival Centre* in Québec City holds the consolidated archives of 12 monasteries and the monastery hospitals of the Fédération des Monastères des Augustines de la Miséricorde de Jésus. This includes a vast collection of rare books and artifacts. The archive is managed by the non-profit organization, Monastère des Augustines. In another example, *Pôle culturel du Monastère des Ursulines*, a non-profit organization with a board of directors and staff, manages the archive of the Ursulines of the Canadian Union which includes the records of all Ursuline monasteries and houses in Quebec and missions from New Brunswick to British Columbia and overseas. There are five archive centers located in Québec City, Trois-Rivières and Rimouski. There is also a museum supported by the provincial government.^{vi}

A different approach is to create a heritage centre. The Sisters of Mercy first amalgamated 25 archives across the United States into six regional archives and then decided to centralize these archives into one, the *Mercy Heritage Center* in North Carolina. The archive holds over thirty collections containing records from the United States, South and Central America, the Caribbean and Guam. The goal was to be cost effective, to transition to lay staff, to save institutional memory and to continue to tell their story. Because of their strong leadership support, they were able to renovate a free-standing building on community property in Belmont over two years, giving time for local archivists to put their collections together. Ten years after the move, processing continues because the application of professional standards was unevenly applied. They use technology to create access for the Sisters who are not in Belmont and the creation of a records management program connects the archival operation and preserves the historical record throughout the federation. Records created after 2006, are held at the administrative centers of each of the six Sisters of Mercy communities located in Belmont, North Carolina; Merion, Pennsylvania; Cumberland, Rhode Island; Buffalo, New York; and Omaha, Nebraska.

Problems with consolidation

The main difficulties encountered with consolidation, identified through the survey, were that records were unprocessed (64.71%) including lack of basic preservation, box lists, arrangement, and description. Other issues included, in order of prevalence:

- Lack of policies and procedures
- Need to purchase new shelving or other furniture
- Use of different classification or cataloguing systems by different archives
- Insufficient staff to process and prepare records for moving
- Concern among organizational members about losing local access
- Difficulty identifying what to send to a central archives
- Restricted record series not identified
- Difficulty finding a central location, or one with environmental controls
- High costs of moving records
- Problems obtaining records for the archives due to lack of a records retention and disposal schedule
- High costs of supplies for processing records
- Getting organizational members to "buy in" to the plan
- Finding a company with expertise in moving archives
- Lack of storage space requiring the use of off-site storage.

Other problems identified through a literature review, and communications with other archivists included:

- Convents closed before their archives could be fully processed
- Most finding aids were not completed before consolidation
- Difficulty setting an insurance value for archival records which have not had a monetary appraisal done, to cover conservation costs if needed in case of damage
- Concern about how moving to a central archive affects identity
- Difficulty encouraging institutional archivists to let go of the archives
- Copyright issues related to records
- Ownership issues related to records
- Costs of renovation and installation of HVAC systems
- The need to find another solution in the future when the lifespan of the organization ends.

Benefits of consolidation

Most survey respondents (56%) felt that consolidation motivated the arrangement and description of records, made it easier to carry out reference inquiries (50%), and facilitated outreach including promotion of scholarly research or making exhibits (48%). The other benefits, in order of prevalence were:

- Led to a renovated or expanded storage area
- Improved access to archives
- Employed more professional archives staff
- Started a digitization program
- Initiated a records management program
- Motivated minimal processing of records (preservation and box lists prepared).

Costs and location

36% of survey respondents indicated it cost \$5,000 or less above annual operating costs to consolidate the archives, while 26% said it cost between \$20,000-\$50,000. For those who used off-site storage, this generally cost \$2,000 or less per year.

For most survey respondents, the consolidated archives were in either a Motherhouse, or a college or university, followed by another building such as an office building, or a heritage centre. Fewer respondents indicated a monastery, diocese or archdiocese, or public repository.

Transfer to third party institutions

Options not involving consolidation are donation or permanent loan to another institution, transfer but with retention of ownership, or setting up a collaborative archives. ^{vii} Few of the survey respondents chose the donation approach for the final disposition of their archives, but among those who did, exactly half indicated they had difficulty finding a recipient who shared the same interests. The other problems encountered were equally problematic:

- The recipient was unwilling to take all of the archive
- Further processing (preservation, arrangement, description) of records was required after donation.

Examples: Transfer to a college or university

There are several examples of religious archives being transferred to a university or college. For example, *St. Jerome's University Archives* in Waterloo, Ontario holds the archive of the Ontario Kentucky Province of the Congregation of the Resurrection, and parish registers of St. Agatha Church. The Religious of Jesus and Mary, America Province, are negotiating a gift of their historical records and some administrative records, including those of Provincial Chapter meetings, to Assumption College, in Worcester, Massachusetts.

In some instances, archives were transferred to a university established by the religious community. A case in point is Mount Mary University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, which holds the archives of eight provinces of the School Sisters of Notre Dame at this private university, including those of the School Sisters of Notre Dame in Waterdown, Ontario. Altogether, 228 boxes including chronicles, directories, minutes from Chapter assemblies, provincial Council communications and directives, circulars from the General Council in Rome, deceased Sisters' records, theses, directories, and newsletters were shipped under a permanent export permit from Ontario to the USA. The material was appraised first to ensure duplicates of material already in the Mount Mary University archive was not duplicated.^{viii} In another example, eight former provinces of the Felician Sisters, including Mississauga in Canada, united to form one new province, Our Lady of Hope. They are building the *Felician Sisters of North America Heritage Center and Archives* at Madonna University in Livonia, Michigan.

Sometimes an archive was split. Laurentian University in Sudbury, Ontario, holds the Franco-Ontarian records of Soeurs de L'Assomption de la Sainte Vierge, Province de l'Ontario but the administrative records are at the Motherhouse. This university also holds the records of the Anglican Diocese of Moosonee.

Universities can be proactive in collecting religious archival collections. The best known is the University of Notre Dame in Indiana which retains ownership of a variety of religious archive collections, including the Leadership Conference of Women Religious. Collections were donated and accepted in original order to underscore the context and continuity of the materials. A very

new initiative is that Boston College, a private Jesuit university in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts, has begun to accept transfers of religious archives.

Santa Clara University, a private Jesuit university in Santa Clara, California, is taking creative approaches to preserving religious history. They are interested in accepting donations of the archives of women religious, and also in increasing the visibility of these archives even without acquiring them, for example by hosting finding aids online, digitizing collections, providing training, sharing storage and office space, providing access to other archival materials through their interlibrary loan system, and other partnerships. Santa Clara University holds the Sisters of the Holy Family archive and they are in talks with other institutions about potential donations. They have also accepted the records of Sr. Emmanuel Bryant, a hermitress in Maine with connections to the California Jesuit Province, and Sr. Sandra Schneiders of the Immaculate Heart of Mary who has connections with the Jesuit Theological College in California. In the latter case, her records related to formation will remain at the Motherhouse in Michigan, but records of her scholarly, professional, and teaching life will be at the University. In all cases, a gift agreement was made, but the agreements do not include immediate transfer of copyright. In the instance of the Sisters of the Holy Family, the congregation retains copyright until the last Sister dies, while in the example of Sr. Emmanuel, copyright only passes to the University upon dissolution of the hermitage. In the case of Sr. Sandra Schneiders, the Motherhouse retains copyright, but the University has a non-exclusive license to make materials available for research and for digital collections, which they are doing using Scholar Commons, an open access institutional repository.

This archive is primarily interested in Roman Catholic congregations with connections to California and Santa Clara University, but they will assess possible donations on a case by case basis. The archive is interested in receiving collections that mirror the values inherent within the university. The Sisters of the Holy Family ministry focused on social work, medicine, daycare, and education. These social justice values correspond to the educational mission of the University. Before accepting a collection, the archive evaluates its suitability for acceptance by determining whether there are similar religious archives in other facilities, whether similar congregations are depositing their collections elsewhere, or whether there is an archive

geographically closer to the donor so that the collection is not divided. In the end, they make the decision about whether to accept a donation based on whether it is good for the congregation, for researchers, and for the University. They do not make funding a requirement for accepting a donation, although the Sisters of the Holy Family did provide an initial \$300,000 gift. Of this, one-third was used to offset transfer costs such as processing the collection. It is important to remember that there are expenses when a collection is donated. The University contracted History Associates in Maryland to do the processing work such as rehousing materials, doing archival descriptions, and entering metadata into Archives Space. The remainder of the donation was used as an endowment for care of the collection and for programming about women religious. The congregation later gave an additional \$200,000, and these endowed funds will enable the University to help other congregations of women religious preserve their archives.

Problems with transfer to a college or university

The issues identified with transfer to a college or university archives were:

- Finding an archive that shares your interests, e.g. Catholic universities or universities interested in healthcare and education
- Negotiating a deed of gift
- Only being able to transfer copyright and legal custody if you hold these as the donor
- Space can be an issue, so it is important to be open about the extent of your archives
- Appraisal will likely need to be done in-house or at the university before the donation takes place
- Restrictions on records can be negotiated, but time limits will be required
- Electronic records must be considered
- Problems if the funding levels lead to reduced staff so that the college or university is unable to care for materials and can only provide storage space.
- Acceptance and description of religious artifacts related to the archival materials.

Benefits of transfer to a college or university

The benefits of transfer to a college or university were made clear by Santa Clara University:

- Availability of a public reading room for access

- Integration of the archival collection within the curriculum for instruction and/or research
- Presence of a professional staff
- Use of a proper climate-controlled environment
- Application of technology and expertise to describe and make available archival collections
- Awareness of the professional standards related to privacy, as they must work with records of various departments, students, and instructors, and apply legislative restrictions
- Respect of donor wishes regarding disposition and use of a collection.

Examples: transfer to a county, city, or provincial repository

There are examples of transfers to a public repository other than a college or university. In several cases, donations were made to public institutions. The *Glengarry County Archives* in Alexandria, Ontario, holds the archive of Our Lady's Missionaries by donation. Another example is the *Archives of Ontario* in Toronto which holds the Fr. Matthew Meehan records of the Edmonton-Toronto Redemptorists. The Redemptorists transferred the copyright to the Archives of Ontario. Similarly, the Soeurs de l'Assomption donated their archive to the *Centre d'Archives Régionales Séminaire de Nicolet* in Nicolet, Québec. As a regional seminary, it collects fonds of the Nicolet region and of significant individuals. In this regard it operates like a county archives. The *Royal BC Museum and Archives* in Victoria, British Columbia, stores the archive of the Sisters of St. Ann which will be donated in 2027. It also houses the archive of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St. Paul's Province by donation.

In other instances, donations were split between public institutions. The Congregation of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary in Rimouski, Québec transferred their education records to the *Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec* (BAnQ) in Rimouski, but they transferred their natural history collection to the *Cégep* of Rimouski and rare books to the *Joseph-Charles Taché Centre* at The Université du Québec à Rimouski.

In some cases, there is a financial contribution along with the donation to a public repository. The Sisters of Charity donated 6,500 artifacts, books, and archives to the *Musée de la Civilisation* in Québec City, Québec, along with a financial contribution to conserve the objects.

There are examples of transfers to public repositories on a loan basis. The *Saint Hyacinthe History Center* in Saint Hyacinthe, Québec holds, on loan, the archive of the Seminary of Saint-Hyacinthe, as well as records of the local bishops, religious communities, parishes, pious associations, clergy, and individuals involved in the diocese. The *Provincial Archives of Alberta* in Edmonton holds the archive of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Grandin Province. This was initially transferred on a permanent loan basis with the Oblates retaining ownership and copyright but was later donated. The *Provincial Archives* also holds the archives of the Sisters of Assumption, the Anglican Church, the Baptist Church, the United Church, the Unitarian Church, and various other churches and parishes. There is a standard gift agreement which is negotiated with each donor.

In some instances, a public repository holds different archives under varying terms. The *Centre du Patrimoine* in Winnipeg, Manitoba, holds the archive of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, Manitoba Province. There was no transfer of ownership for these records, but there is a contribution to staff salary. It also holds the archives of the Sœurs du Sauveur, and the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, Manitoba Province. The archive of the Missionary Oblates of St. Boniface is also located here, and space is being rented until the donation is completed. The last Trappist monastery in western Canada, the Notre Dame des Prairies community, sent its entire collection to the *Centre du Patrimoine*, with a financial contribution for the development of the collection.

Problems with transfer to a county, city, or provincial repository

The issues identified with donation to a public repository were:

- Developing a donor agreement that ensures the preservation of the religious charism and heritage
- Lack of continuity managing the collection due to staff changes which can alter the initial commitment to the religious organization

- Possible need for programming to educate the archives staff about the institution's history, customs, culture, and importance
- Difficulty ensuring that the receiving institution respects access restrictions and copyright on unpublished materials
- The importance of the receiving institution creating metadata including access points that accurately reflect the content of the records.

Examples: transfer to a diocesan archive

Some diocesan archives hold archives by donation. The *Bishop Farrell Library and Archives*, in Hamilton, Ontario, holds the archive of the Sisters of Social Service by donation. The Diocese of Calgary holds the records of the Sisters of Charity of St. Louis Western Province, but ownership remains with the Sisters until the last Sister dies and then the diocese will own the records.

In other cases, diocesan archives simply provide storage space. The Saint John diocesan pastoral centre in New Brunswick holds the archive of The Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception of Saint John, but the congregation retains full ownership and control of the archive. A more complex example is the Diocese of Saskatoon which holds the archive of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, St. Mary's Province with no transfer of ownership. It also holds the archives of the Ursulines of Bruno, the Ursulines of Prelate, the Franciscan Sisters of St. Elizabeth, the Sisters of Mission Service, the Daughters of Providence, the Sisters of Sion, and the Sisters of Our Lady of the Cross. Five of these congregations donated their records. The Sisters of Sion did not donate their records, but after they have been processed by the congregational members, they are gradually moved to archival storage. The records of the Sisters of Our Lady of the Cross are in the process of being moved to the archives. Six of the congregations provide funding to the diocesan archives.

The Trois-Rivières diocese holds the archives of the Soeurs Dominicaines of Berthierville, the Filles de Jésus, the Carmélite Sisters and the Oblates de Bethanie Sisters.

Problems with transfer to a diocesan archive

The issues identified with transfer to a diocesan or archdiocesan archive were:

- The willingness of the diocese to accept the records of a religious institution
- The need to ensure that the transfer agreement guarantees that the staff will spend time working with the donor's records if the agreement includes funding for staff.

Benefits of transfer to third party repositories

The benefits of donation were overwhelmingly identified by survey respondents as more access to records for historians and other scholars (100%), followed by 75% of respondents who indicated that donation led to improved storage (environment, space, security); 75% who said that the recipient had greater scope for outreach; and 75% who felt that there was a satisfaction in knowing the heritage would be preserved for posterity. Half of the respondents felt a benefit was the increase in professional staff. A smaller number (25%) felt there was a cost savings.

Costs and location

The survey asked the question: *How much has it cost to date, above annual operating costs, to donate the archives (excluding normal salary costs)?* There were three options:

\$0-\$5,000

\$5,000-\$10,000

\$10,000-\$20,000

50% of survey respondents indicated it cost \$5,000 or less to donate their archives, while 50% indicated it cost more than \$50,000. 75% of respondents made a financial contribution to the recipient of \$10,000 or less, while 25% contributed more than \$100,000.

Most survey respondents donated their archive to a college or university, followed by a diocesan or archdiocesan archives. One respondent donated their archive to a collaborative archives that is in process as well as to a university.

Collaborative archive arrangement

There are several examples of different archives collaborating on a shared space. The Archdiocese of Kingston in Ontario is partnering with Sisters of Providence of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph (St. Joseph Region Archives), to repurpose a

historic church, The Church of the Good Thief, into an archival facility, the *St. Dismas Archives*. The facility will serve as a research centre and hold the records of the archdiocese and partner congregations. In another case, a shared repository, the *Archdiocèse of Québec Heritage Center* in Québec City is under the authority of the Bishop. It holds the records of the Archdiocese, as well as a rich collection that includes seminaries, colleges, parishes, missions, religious organizations, and religious communities including the Religieux de Saint-Vincent-de-Paul, Frères Notre-Dame de la Miséricorde, Sœurs de Sainte-Jeanne-d'Arc (Generalate), Séminaire/Collège Saint-Augustin, the Sœurs Dominicaines de la Trinité (registers), and the Association des Supérieurs majeurs du diocèse de Québec.

The first application of a collaborative religious archives in the United States was the Society of the Sacred Heart in St. Louis, Missouri. In the 1970s, the archives of the five provinces in the United States were consolidated, and in 1982, the five provinces merged to become the U.S. Province of the Society of the Sacred Heart. Around 1998, the congregation acquired a renovated public library building. In 2013, the U.S. and Canadian Provinces of the Society of the Sacred Heart merged, and the U.S. and Canadian materials were centralized in this building, which also houses the archive of the Antilles Province, mostly Puerto Rico.

The Chicago Archive Collaborative was created in 2007 to house religious collections. Currently the Claretian Missionaries Archives USA-Canadian Province, the Archives of the North American Province of the Cenacle, and the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of Chicago form the group. The shared 5,550 square feet of space includes, a reading room, processing areas, stacks, and private offices. Each organization provides staff and maintains management of their own collections exclusively.

In some instances, a foundation was set up to support the collaborative archives. The Archdiocese of Sherbrooke, partnered with several institutions to create a foundation and open an archives/heritage centre in St. Michael's Basilica, *Le Centre d'archives Mgr.-Antoine-Racine* in Sherbrooke, Québec. It is accredited by the National Library and Archives of Quebec and holds the records of the Archdiocese of Sherbrooke and the Séminaire de Sherbrooke. It will eventually provide space for four religious communities: Sœurs Missionnaires Notre-Dame des

Anges, Petites Sœurs de la Sainte-Famille, Filles de la Charité du Sacré-Cœur de Jésus and Frères du Sacré-Cœur. The terms of transfer will be negotiated for each institution on a case by case basis. The *Marie-Léonie Paradis Center* which is the museum of the Little Sisters of the Holy Family, is also located at the Basilica. The archives and the museum are open to the public.

An instructive example is that of The *Table de concertation des archives de la région de Montréal* (TCARM), which was an initiative of the *Association of Religious Archivists* (RAR) and of congregations concerned with the preservation of their archives. It was created in January 2014. The TCARM is trying to set up an archives center in partnership with the diocese and working with religious communities that are, or were, active in Montreal. In 2016, RAR and TCARM commissioned a feasibility study by an architectural firm. In the same year, the City of Montreal acquired the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph convent and the Mayor suggested creating an archives centre at this site. A director was hired in 2017 and he undertook a needs assessment by visiting each archive. While waiting for the archives centre to materialize, some religious communities stored their archives with other institutions. Following this, TCARM incorporated under the name *Fondation archives et patrimoine religieux du Grand Montréal*. Also, in 2017, the City invited the foundation to join the *Cité des Hospitalières* project. The archives center remains a central feature of this project with the City as the main contractor of the former convent property. There are 19 institutions involved in this initiative.

Problems with a collaborative archive

The issues identified with a shared repository were:

- Having different cataloguing systems in place
- Some problems with legal and finance records crossing an international border^{ix}
- Ensuring the needs of different institutions are met
- Developing a business and financing plan
- Dealing with legal incorporation
- Finding a location or building site.

Benefits of a collaborative archive

Dr. Malachy McCarthy, with the Chicago Archive Collaborative, noted the benefits of sharing an archives space:

- The religious institution can employ its own professional staff who has familiarity with, and maintains, the continuity of the collection
- Use of shared space for reading rooms and processing area
- Storage area can be closed only to archive employees
- Collaboration of religious archives in one site facilitates professional interaction among archivists
- The possibility of creating a shared space for digitization of materials.

A study done by the *Regroupement des archivistes religieux* in Quebec in 2002 looked at alternatives for archives as religious communities face completion. It recommended that the best choice would be to seek collaborative solutions with other congregations, locating a regional archives in a building with a religious character at the centre of a region, but without dependence on any religious community. It noted that moving an archive to a Motherhouse is a temporary solution, while sharing an archive with another congregation might be less desirable as the lifespan of another religious community might also be tenuous. It viewed sharing space with diocesan archives, historical societies, and certified regional centres as viable, particularly in the case of remote communities. The study emphasized the importance of setting up a foundation that entails a trust fund, managed by an independent body, the interest of which can be used to establish an archives centre and provide for continuing operation. It recommended that religious communities use legal contracts and ensure they retain copyright when they deposit their archive. The report noted that an archive must be processed to archival standards before deposit.

Considerations

There are many things to consider when embracing the future. As Sr. Jean Bartunek noted at the Boston conference, religious institutions must think of other stakeholders, (influencers, collaborators, recipients, friends, moral and legal claims, and members of the diocese), because closure can negatively affect relationships and others' memory of the organization.

Nevertheless, decisions must be taken concerning valuable assets. Besides textual records and photographs, religious archives often contain artifacts and relics. In a worst-case scenario, it is better to just sell rare books, artifacts, art, and furniture, but not the archive. It is also important not to break up archival collections.

The archivist should be involved in providing professional advice regarding the future disposition of the archives. Any new location chosen must have a storage area with environmental controls, be fire and flood resistant, have fire detection and suppression systems, have secure key control, have powder coated steel shelving, be regularly cleaned, and be free of pests and mold. *Archival Resources for Catholic Collections* provides a checklist that can be used to assess an archival program.^x

Appraisal is critical. The *Custodia* initiative through the *Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious*, was an excellent model of a program that supported archivists with little appraisal experience in determining what should be kept, with a view to the future. The initiative, now on hiatus, has supported 75 religious institutions to date. As Dee Gallo, of *Custodia* pointed out, one does not want to transfer everything when making plans for future disposition. One wants to transfer records that will tell the story that the organization wants to tell. Whatever goes into the archive becomes the history of the organization, so it matters to have someone who knows about the religious organization to help make appraisal decisions prior to transfer. Decisions should be made considering what researchers will want, copyright, and with legal advice on transfer agreements.

When consolidating different archives, there will be costs for new shelving, transport, insurance, and possibly renovations or off-site storage. If storing material at another repository, there must be an agreement to deposit and retain ownership of the archives. This agreement should state that materials will be stored in safe custody, reasonable precautions will be taken for preservation, and materials will be protected against fire, flood, theft, misplacement, and wrongful use. It should be remembered that a temporary or long-term storage arrangement is not a permanent solution.

If the decision is to make a permanent loan of the archive, the donor needs to specify research restrictions and copyright. A long-term care agreement should be made which allows for research access, and with the responsibility of care specified. Permanent loans are not beneficial for the receiving institution. It is preferable to transfer ownership.

When transferring an archive to another institution, the transfer agreement is critical. It is important to involve lawyers to ensure that the transfer meets the needs of both parties, the donor, and the recipient. It should be specified in the agreement whether the receiving institution will be moving the archive in the future and what will happen to the archive should the institution close. The recipient should have comprehensive policies and procedures in place, especially a disaster management plan, and access, privacy, and copyright policies.

Under a gift arrangement, the donor should transfer and assign rights, title and interest in the records which become the sole property of the recipient. Another organization is more likely to take the archive if the collection is open to researchers, and processing, arranging, and describing is completed. The donor must indicate whether the records are open for researchers and copies are permitted, or if the records are restricted to selected researchers for specific purposes, or if the records are closed and not accessible to anyone for a specified period of time. The donor can ask to be contacted if the recipient decides to deaccession any material. The donating institution should ensure that the recipient understands its charm and history, which can be accomplished by providing good descriptions of record groups which include administrative histories and dates of series.

Working paper

Looking toward what religious organizations can do now to prepare for the future was the theme of a working paper which came out in January 2020 as a result of the Boston conference. It had three key themes: collaboration, education, and advocacy (McCarthy and Coburn, 2020). The working paper stated that cooperative planning and shared solutions as well as thoughtful discussions about the future of religious archives are necessary. It emphasized the importance of informing leadership and historians about the importance of archives, promoted participation in conferences and training, and recommended that a shared website and listserv be set up. The

listserv, *Archival Resources for Catholic Collections (ARCC)* (www.archivalrcc.org), is now active. The paper also encouraged institutions to publicize and make their collections accessible to ensure the development of sustainable repositories. It supported partnerships with other agencies, institutions, and community groups, and urged the scholarly use of collections. The working paper noted that it is important to seek the advice of experienced archivists and scholars to develop professional archival programs, and that it is critical to work with religious leaders and archivists to identify funding to save collections.

The working paper made some recommendations, including the establishment of a national or regional network of repositories sharing cooperative goals. It recommended setting up working groups to develop resources related to archival management, such as appraisal guidelines, descriptive practices, reference and access policies, management of digital collections, and continuing education. Finally, it proposed that a legal corporation could serve as ombudsman for all repositories and allocate funds. These recommendations are interesting and show the importance of cooperative action across repositories. Even prior to the working paper, there were efforts to encourage collaboration and sharing among archives, such as the *Catholic Resources Research Alliance*.

ARCC's goal is to bridge the gap between religious leaders, archivists, and scholars to preserve religious archival collections. Unlike other organizations, dedicated working groups composed of members from each of these constituencies will suggest solutions from a broader perspective. This process of making informed decisions benefits the future preservation of Catholic religious collections.

The survey discussed earlier in this paper, provided a snapshot of what religious archivists are doing vis-à-vis the working paper recommendations. The survey respondents indicated that over half (58.14%) were participating in conferences or training on the topic of the future of religious archives. Nearly half (45.74%) were encouraging the scholarly use of their collections. A substantial number (43.41%) were developing resources related to archival management, descriptive practices, reference and access policies, and management of digital collections. A large number (41.86%) were growing partnerships with other agencies, institutions, and

community groups. This figure does show that there is more collaboration taking place than the conclusion drawn by Choi and Nilson (2019) who state that “collaboration is not common among Catholic archives.” A number (39.53%) had signed up to the *Archival Resources for Catholic Collections* listserv. A lower number (32.56%) were seeking the advice of experienced archivists and scholars to develop a professional archival program. Only about one-quarter of the respondents (27.91%) were publicizing and making their archives accessible to ensure the development of sustainable repositories. Approximately the same number (26.36%) were taking part in a working group on the future of religious archives. An equally low number (25.58%) were working with religious leaders and archivists to identify funding to save archival collections. A quite low number (6.20%) were discussing the transfer of their archives to Boston College.

Some respondents indicated some interesting approaches to facing their future. One noted that they were making more use of the archive by curating exhibits and creating publications based on the collections for the congregation, to make them more aware of their history, while another said they were working to educate conference leadership on the importance of continuing the archive despite costs. Another respondent noted that they were training both salaried and volunteer interns for projects. Yet another indicated that they were working with the *Archivists for Congregations of Women Religious* which has been concerned with the future of religious archives for several years.

Conclusion

My research shows that there are three main approaches to the final disposition of religious archives: consolidation, transfer to another repository through donation or permanent loan, and creating a collaborative archives. At present, it appears that consolidation is the most popular choice, likely because internal control over collections is maintained. This is, however, not a permanent solution since religious organizations may still face closure in the future. Archivists shared concerns over donation or permanent loan to a public repository, primarily based on whether the charism of the religious institution would be understood and valued. If transfer to a public repository is chosen, it is critical to have a clear transfer agreement that has been vetted by a lawyer and covers copyright and privacy issues. Public repositories prefer donations to

permanent loans, so it is important to ensure the recipient is well-versed in the charism and administrative history of the donating institution, as control of the collection will be handed over. The benefit is that these repositories offer more secure funding, professional staff, and access opportunities for the long-term care of collections. Few archives are being donated to, or deposited in, diocesan archives, possibly due to the unwillingness or inability of dioceses to accommodate the archives of other institutions such as communities of men and women religious. Collaborative, shared archive spaces seem to be a good option, provided there is a source of continued funding in place, and the space is located in the geographic area served by the institutions. However, as with consolidation, the problem is finding a secure, climate-controlled storage space. No matter which option is chosen, collections should be appraised and at least minimally processed, with restricted records and copyright issues identified, before they are moved to a centralized archive, or to another repository, or collaborative archives.

It is reassuring to note that religious archivists are thinking of the future, by taking part in training and conferences on this topic, by developing resources for archival management, and by growing partnerships. It is likely that more work needs to be done on outreach and working with institutional leaders to develop long-term plans and ensure funding is in place for the future.

It would seem that there are several viable options that answer the question, “what do we do with the archives?” but that whatever happens, it is critical to begin preparing the archives for the future in the present. As Mary Kenney, archivist for the Marianists said, each religious community and institution must think about how important their charism is, and how important it is to preserve something intangible through the history of the works of the religious community or institution. We must think about how the institution has changed the world, and how generation after generation gave up their lives to serve God and their fellow human beings.

There are multiple reasons why Santa Clara University is motivated to provide a home for the archives of women religious: to make the contributions of women in the church more widely known; to share the stories of Sisters’ work with underrepresented populations; to raise up marginalized voices; to change the misperceptions people may have of vowed religious; and to tell the stories of the people that Sisters served, which may not otherwise be told. These are

reasons that many religious communities and institutions, as well as historians, can resonate with. We must preserve archives to preserve history, long after the last member of a religious community, parish, synagogue, temple, educational institution, or seminary is gone.

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¹ I am deeply grateful to Dr. Malachy McCarthy for his generosity in providing critical feedback on this paper. I am also indebted to Sr. Loretta Manzara, Veronica Stienburg, and David Bureau for reading this paper and providing thoughtful suggestions. All errors are mine alone.

ⁱⁱ The Future of Religious Archives survey link was sent out through five listservs in the United States and Canada on March 3, 2020 and remained open until March 13, 2020. In total, there were 287 respondents to the survey. Respondents who indicated that no planning or decisions had been taken, based on responses to questions 2 and 15 (with null responses to questions 3 and 9), were removed from the survey analysis. Two respondents who did not work in a religious archive (based on responses to question 22) were removed from the survey analysis. This left a total of 243 respondents, and of these, only completed surveys were analyzed, for a total of 129 surveys.

ⁱⁱⁱ Some respondents indicated that their communities or institutions were not diminishing in number, or their archives were not facing closure.

^{iv} Many of the examples in this paper draw on the work of M.C. Havey in her study of the disposition of archives (2019), as well as my communications with various religious archivists.

^v The Oblate Missionaries have a complex history. There were originally eight provinces, but now there are only three. St. Peter's Province was an English-speaking province based in Ottawa but with members in British Columbia. The BC members became St. Paul's Province in 1973. In 2003, the Provinces of Grandin (Alberta, part of Saskatchewan, and the NWT), St. Paul's/Order of OMI, St. Peter's, St. Mary's (in Saskatchewan) and Manitoba joined to form OMI Lacombe Canada. Two Quebec provinces merged to form Notre Dame du Cap in 2004. The Deschâtelets Archives was begun by the Scholasticate St. Joseph in Ottawa and St. Peter's Province archives were there too. These archives both moved to Richelieu, Quebec. There remains Assumption based in Mississauga, Ontario (Polish Oblates).

^{vi} There is a complex history to this. Under the Canadian Union, all Ursuline monasteries and houses had their own archive centers and were independent. Later, the archives were brought together under the authority of the Maison provinciale du Québec, and an archives coordinator was hired manage all the archives centers. In 2017, the Pôle culturel du Monastère des Ursulines was formed to manage the archives and museum collections. The archive centers are managed by the archives coordinator but are in five different places and in three different cities. The Pôle culturel du Monastère des Ursulines and the archives of the Monastery of Quebec are in Québec city. The archives of the Ursulines of Trois-Rivières and the Mauricie region are in Trois-Rivières. The archives of Monastère de Rimouski and Eastern Quebec are in Rimouski. The provincial house archives and archives of monasteries and closed communities are at the Maison provincial du Québec. The Maison générale in Québec holds the archives of the Canadian Union. It should be noted that the Ursulines of the Chatham Union are not included in this discussion, as they were the first foundation for expansion in English Canada and retain their own archives.

^{vii} One example has been found of a transfer to a religious archive: The Sisters of St. Joseph of Toronto, Toronto, Ontario, provides storage space for the archives of the Sisters of Service.

^{viii} According to Sr. Joan Helm, it took one month to obtain a permanent export permit. In Canada, under the *Cultural Property Export and Import Act*, archival collections may contain textual, photographic, iconographic, or cartographic records or sound recordings. An export permit is required if the collection has a fair market value of over \$2,000, is more than 50 years old, falls under the Control List criteria, or contains material made by a person no longer living. The permit application process entails sampling the collection and providing copies for review by an expert examiner. The permit may be refused if it is determined that the collection is of outstanding significance and national importance, in which case, the archives can be donated or sold to a person or institution within Canada. In any case of a refusal, the decision can and should be appealed to avoid a two-year delay in submitting a new application.

^{ix} While not directly identified in the survey or interviews, problems with crossing international borders could also apply when consolidating archives or when transferring archives to a college or university, as noted by Veronica Stienburg. In Canada, the Cultural Property Export, and Import Act (R.S.C., 1985, c. C-51) applies to archives.

^x Archival Resources for Catholic Collections, Religious Community Archive Checklist, <https://bit.ly/2PxrDR4>