

SELECTED PAPERS

Careful Considerations: Designing Workflows for Content Selection, Copyright, Privacy Concerns, and Cultural Competency

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Digitizing the Deaf Catholic Archives: A Project to Open and Provide Access to a Collection of Print and (Audio)visual Materials which Document the History, Culture, and Religious Education of Deaf Catholics in the United States and Beyond was awarded a Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR) Digitizing Hidden Collections grant in April 2022. This paper will introduce this hidden collection and describe prioritized areas of consideration as the project gets underway. These areas include the development of workflows to address such complex issues as content selection, privacy concerns, and permissions, while mindfully incorporating the nuances of Deaf culture in all processes.

An initial priority of the project design is configuring workflows to obtain permissions in order to make materials publicly available after digitization. The collection includes over 200 newsletters, with copyright holders varying from international organizations to individual church parishes. Another priority is to identify and manage personal identifiable information contained in items selected for digitization, such as birthdays, emails, and mailing addresses. Since this collection documents how Deaf Catholics practice their faith, personal stories are found throughout and those privacy concerns must be addressed as well. Workflows will be developed to review materials before they are made public in the digital repository. A takedown policy will be established to address any privacy concerns after the project is completed.

Throughout this project, we strive to be mindful and inclusive of the Deaf community as we work with materials outside our knowledge base. In particular, we seek the Deaf community's input for description and metadata, and how to address offensive or outdated terminology, especially as part of the collection's online presence.



REV. JOSEPH BRUCE, SJ, served as a resource and consultant for this presentation. His input was integral to the presentation and we acknowledge him as a contributor. Fr. Bruce, born deaf, attended Clarke School for the Deaf, a residential school where, during the days before support services, students were prepared orally without the use of sign language for mainstreaming into regular high schools. He attended Cathedral High School (Springfield, Massachusetts), entered the Society of Jesus in 1974, and

was ordained a priest in 1981. Fr. Bruce performed Deaf ministry in multiple American and Guatemalan dioceses until his assignment to work with the Deaf Catholic Archives. He is delighted to work with Holy Cross archivists and librarians, sharing his memories and knowledge of the collection. His priority now is to travel in order to collect as much material as possible and to help researchers locate the hidden treasures of Deaf Catholic history. Fr. Bruce received his BA from the College of the Holy Cross, MDiv from Weston Jesuit School of Theology (now Boston College School of Theology and Ministry), and MS in Special Education for the Deaf from Canisius College, where as an adult he was introduced to American Sign Language and Deaf Culture.

About the Collection

The Deaf Catholic Archives, referred to hereafter as the DCA, was founded by Rev. Joseph Bruce, SJ in the 1970s. At that time, Fr. Bruce was a Jesuit novice whose first assignment was to minister to people who are Deaf. Through this work, he was given a set of newsletters pertaining to Deaf Catholics. As a member of the Deaf community himself, he found the materials interesting and informative. Since computers were not readily available at the time, the practical difficulties of following conversations with hearing people, and a cultural hesitancy at the time to ask too many questions (so as not to appear “stupid” by hearing people) (Bruce 2022) meant that the only way to get information was by reading. Fr. Bruce continued to collect material about Deaf Catholics, using the collection as a personal library to better educate himself on how to best serve the Deaf Catholic community and as a reference while he was studying theology. Eventually, he realized that the information could only collectively be found within his own assemblage.

Fr. Bruce began storing the donations in a filing cabinet in his bedroom and called it the Deaf Catholic Archives. Referring to the materials as an “archives” was intentional because he wanted to “impress hearing people with something that cannot be found anywhere else” (Bruce 2022). Except for visiting his college archive as an undergraduate, he had little understanding of and no training about formal archives. However, he knew it was a specialized profession and wanted his own collection (and collecting efforts) to sound professional. The self-named “archives” had neither paid, professionally-trained staff nor a budget. General office supplies were used to organize the collection and were paid for out of pocket or with donations. Unlike a formal archive, the DCA did not have a permanent location. It traveled with its curator.

In 1990, Fr. Bruce was living with the Jesuit Community at the College of the Holy Cross, located in Worcester, Massachusetts. The DCA, which for a long time had been kept in his bedroom, was housed in the basement of the Jesuit residence. By that time, the collection had grown to 15 filing cabinets. Relocation of the Holy Cross Jesuit Community to a new residence forced Fr. Bruce to find another home for the collection. He contacted several institutions (none of which were Holy

Cross) and received either a negative response or none at all. A chance conversation with Rev. John Brooks, SJ, then president of Holy Cross, resulted in the donation of the DCA to the College's Archives & Distinctive Collections. Though Fr. Bruce's provincial assignments and ministry took him to other places in the world, he continued to send materials for the DCA to the College.

In 2015, Fr. Bruce returned to Holy Cross and his primary assignment was to curate the DCA. Between 1990 and 2015, the collection had been minimally processed for a variety of reasons. The collection was growing but access was very limited; discovery and searchability were nonexistent. Since 2015, significant progress has been made in both processing and promoting the collection in order to increase its usefulness and accessibility. Today, the DCA provides insight into the history of Deaf culture as well as an understanding of how Deaf Catholics practice their faith (culturally) in new ways, when traditional methods are insufficient. This unique collection documents the ways in which this subset of a mainstream community, unable to fully participate and therefore somewhat marginalized, adapted and organized to create a vibrant faith community within the greater Catholic Church that is both spiritually and socially fulfilling. A wide variety of materials can be found in the archives, such as documents, photographs, and ephemera from a variety of institutions across the globe including parishes and regional Deaf Catholic organizations.

Hidden Collections Grant

In 2021, CLIR announced a change to the focus of their Hidden Collections grant program and for the next cycle would fund projects that “deepened the public understanding of the histories of people of color and other communities and populations whose work, experiences, and perspectives have been insufficiently recognized or unattended.” Downtime caused by the COVID-19 pandemic offered an opportunity for the Holy Cross Archives & Distinctive Collections team to investigate possible grant-funded projects. The DCA was identified as a possible project at this time. After the call for applications was announced, the Archives team immediately agreed to submit a proposal for the DCA. The two-round application process was completed in 2021 and the grant was awarded in April 2022.

Content Selection

During the initial application process for the CLIR grant, the Holy Cross Archives team was mostly working from off campus. There was limited access to all archival collections and this affected the initial content selection process. The DCA is a large collection of about 188 cubic feet and consists of several series which are unique and require different considerations for digitization. There was too much material for the desired project; therefore, the scope was reduced for the final grant application. The grant team followed a list of criteria to create a more manageable project. Materials in the DCA were evaluated based on the following criteria: importance as recommended by Fr. Bruce; what might be popular or most useful; the condition of the original materials; privacy concerns and to what extent they would inhibit the full benefit or usefulness of the material; and of course, copyright. While not comprehensive, this digitization project will address all of the newsletters and a considerable number of publications in other series, as well as some scrapbooks that were determined to be the highest priority. The considerations and workflows that follow are based on the newsletters, but will be used and adapted as necessary for other items and future digitization projects.

Privacy

Since the collection documents how Deaf Catholics practice their faith, personal stories can be found throughout. Some materials contain personal identifiable information such as birthdays, emails, and mailing addresses. Other concerns were brought up by copyright holders. Decisions about which information will be redacted, and which items will be not available in full text or online at all, will be determined on an individual basis. In some instances, this could be at the series level. An example is the biographical files about specific individuals, many of whom are still living. The privacy considerations for these materials are complex and decisions regarding access could potentially slow down the project.

Furthermore, a takedown notice will be created and posted on various web pages created during the course of the project, such as the website where the digital images will live. Any privacy concerns will continue to be addressed during the course of the grant as well as beyond.

Copyright

Dealing with publications of any kind involves copyright considerations; the variety of materials in the DCA further complicated this task. Some content was in the public domain due to age. Examples include *The Catholic Deaf Mute* (1900–1905) and *The Ecclesiastical Review* (1893–1917). Some content, such as the *National Catholic Education Association Bulletin*, was published by an established publishing house or organization. This requires going through the standard permission request process. However, much of the material includes nonprofessional publications by individuals, nonprofit organizations, association chapters, religious orders, parishes, pastoral ministry offices, and dioceses or archdioceses. This requires determining who has ultimate authority to grant permission.

Determining Ownership

A conversation with the Judicial Vicar for the Diocese of Worcester revealed that according to canon law, in most cases authority for copyright belongs to dioceses and archdioceses. This is especially helpful given the number of parishes that have merged or closed. Schools for the Deaf experienced similar change as many became state-run or closed. In the case of some publications, there was overlap when the local IDCA chapter was in a parish or diocese. We needed to determine who had authority for the newsletter and who would be contacted, or whether it needed to be both. Another consideration was that over the years, pastoral ministry offices changed names, no longer existed, or became secular organizations serving the greater Deaf community and not just Catholics. Personnel certainly changed during the past 100 years, so identifying the right contact person was also part of the discovery process. Of course, orphan works always present a copyright challenge and some of those exist as well.

Copyright Permissions Workflow

The first step in the copyright permissions workflow was to establish a system to document and track the status of obtaining permission. A master spreadsheet was created for the newsletters that are to be digitized with the title, dates, primary organizations associated with the publication, secondary organizations, and contact information. The Catholic Directory¹ was used heavily for this, but Google searches and even Facebook served as additional sources of hard-to-find

¹ <https://www.catholicdirectory.com/>

information. The document *The Permission to Publish* was also consulted.² As the information gathering was underway, documents were annotated, and separate spreadsheets were created to isolate particular information. Next a “request to Digitize” letter was drafted for the organizations identified as the probable copyright holder. This letter defined the Deaf Catholic Archives, mentioned the CLIR grant, explained that some material had been identified with the organization and that the DCA wished to digitize it and make it available online, notified the recipient that an official request to digitize was forthcoming, and included an enclosure listing the titles and dates associated with the recipient.

While this preliminary permission letter did not solicit or expect responses, many recipients did respond. Written and verbal permissions were received from several organizations. However, they could not be considered official without the signed consent form provided by legal counsel. Requests for more information, notices of surprise that these even existed, and some rejections were also received. These responses were followed up with in a variety of ways. This included phone calls to explain the project in more detail, providing scans and other means of addressing requests to review material, answering such questions as “How did you get this item? How did you know it was us?” and happily receiving permissions but explaining this couldn’t officially count as an acceptance. A few cases resulted in lengthier conversations about potentially problematic content and the organization’s decision to deny permission for digitization and online access. The benefit of these unsolicited responses was the acquisition of current contact information to use for further communication. They also provided a means of identifying errors in the initial effort to determine copyright ownership. As always, this was all documented.

For a second round of communication to identified copyright holders, an “official request to digitize” was drafted. This was a cover letter which reminded recipients that they had received prior communication from the DCA regarding a forthcoming request, which was now enclosed. Legal counsel for the College of the Holy Cross assisted with drafting the official contract that permitted Holy Cross to digitize and provide online access to the materials in question. DocuSign was selected as the electronic signature platform if current, reliable email addresses were available. The contract was accompanied by an appendix, which was the same as the enclosure from the first letter and identified once again the titles and dates of the materials which had been associated with the organization. The appendix also provided a space for how the recipient wished to be identified for the repository’s copyright statement. It was determined that three contacts would benefit from translation, so a transcription service was used for those letters.

Obtaining official permission from organizations is still underway. Specifically, there are a number of organizations who did not respond to the initial letter so contact information is lacking for the person/people who can give permission to digitize.

Cultural Competency

Learning Deaf Cultural Competency

It is important to note that the Deaf community does not see deafness as a disability. Instead, they view themselves as a linguistic and cultural minority. Throughout the twentieth century, the Deaf

² Committee on Doctrine, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Permission to Publish: A Resource for Diocesan and Eparchial Bishops on the Approvals Needed to Publish Various Kinds of Written Works* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004).

community advocated and fought to change the prevailing mindset of the hearing majority that deafness is a disability. This is why they prefer to spell “deaf” with a capital D.

The members of the grant team are all hearing and have varying degrees of knowledge about the Deaf community. We recognized how important it was for us to become familiar with Deaf culture in order for the grant project to be successful. Fr. Bruce’s support and guidance were critical throughout the process. As a Deaf person, Fr. Bruce has shared invaluable instruction and nuances of Deaf culture and American Sign Language (ASL) that reinforce our intentions for mindfulness and for including members of the Deaf community as we work with materials outside our knowledge base. As founder and curator, he knows the collection better than anyone, including the provenance of each item. He is in contact with many of the individuals and organizations who have donated materials. Fr. Bruce travels the country collecting materials and promoting the collection as well as working with researchers who have learned of the Deaf Catholic Archives, guiding them how to use the existing resources as well as advising on the next steps to take after using the DCA’s materials. Furthermore, as the first Deaf Jesuit priest in the global history of the Jesuits (Kte’pi 2015, 106), he is a member of the very community the DCA documents, and can offer both personal and professional experience to help us understand and describe the significance of this collection.

Finally, it is crucial that members of the Deaf community are aware of this collection and have the opportunity to use it, contribute to it, and provide invaluable feedback about content, metadata, and background information that can only come from members of the community represented in a collection or archive.

Understanding What Is Needed

In order to engage the Deaf community, we have a robust outreach plan. This was developed as part of the initial grant application and has been further informed and strengthened by interactions with several Deaf individuals. Deborah Sinkis, a local Deaf woman, was interviewed by members of the grant team. She agreed readily with the importance of making people aware of the DCA, for a number of reasons. She states that “the information is not out there” and says “you have to know the history,” “to know what’s happening now,” and “to understand what was good ... and not so good” and “learn from it” so that members of the Deaf community are brought in as part of any process that involves Deaf people or interests (Sinkis 2022).

Making the Archives “Deaf-friendly”

Another aspect of our cultural competency includes becoming Deaf-friendly. Deaf-friendly means more than simply being welcoming and inclusive. Rather it is a specific group of behaviors that makes interaction and communication most comfortable and effective for the Deaf person. Some things to keep in mind include having Deaf-friendly faces to staff the archives. This means people should understand how to facilitate lipreading by smiling, situating themselves in an area with enough lighting, and having expressive faces. It also means arranging to have interpreters available upon request and making that option apparent. If an interpreter is present, it is essential to speak directly to the Deaf person and not direct conversation to the interpreter. If reading is part of the interaction, wait for a Deaf person to stop looking at a document and look at you before you begin speaking. It is helpful to wear dark clothing if you are signing but important not to assume every Deaf person knows ASL. Lastly, keep an iPad or paper and pen available as a backup communication.

Conclusion

The grant project is still in the early stages so present goals for the future may change or be adjusted along the way. It is hoped that the content of the DCA will be expanded and enhanced as one of the results of this project. This specifically includes adding more audiovisual content, digitizing the existing VHS tapes, and adding closed captioning when needed, especially to the videos that are only in ASL. Increasing the book collection related to Deaf Catholics and Catholicism as practiced and experienced by the Deaf community is another opportunity for expansion. It would also be beneficial to investigate conducting surveys and other forms of outreach as well as acquiring information about Deaf culture at other Catholic colleges and universities, particularly Jesuit ones. Finally, increasing biographical content about Deaf Catholics is another objective. Letters are especially desirable because they are rare among the Deaf community.

Perhaps the most important goal is to increase outreach efforts with the Deaf community and beyond. Some of these efforts will include creating more publicly accessible finding aids that are easily linked to materials digitized during the grant project. In addition, building collaborations with Gallaudet University, the only liberal arts college for the Deaf in the world, the National Institute for the Deaf, a college at the Rochester Institute of Technology, and other institutions serving the Deaf community will further expand the reach of the DCA while also ensuring it stays relevant to the community it documents and serves.

The CLIR grant to digitize parts of the DCA continues work begun fifty years ago by Fr. Bruce, but the grant will end and he may decide to retire someday. So it is important to make sure what has been started will be sustained. Future sources of funding must be considered, whether that be pursuing other grant opportunities, working with our institution's Advancement Office to secure donations, or petitioning to have the DCA receive its own line in the overall budget. Finally, it should be considered whether to make the current Project Archivist role for the DCA permanent, especially if Fr. Bruce vacates his position, and if so, whether it will be a member of the Deaf community or a hearing person.

Ultimately, the initial considerations for content selection, privacy, copyright, and cultural competency, combined with goals to expand, sustain, and provide ongoing awareness and access to this once-hidden collection, will help guide and inform any future work after the grant has expired. In so doing, the Deaf Catholic Archives will serve as a unique and valuable resource that continues to preserve and share the history while “amplifying unheard voices” (Council on Library and Information Resources, n.d.) of the Deaf community. ●

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Author Bios

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CORINNE TABOLT (she/her) is the collections manager at the Gunn Memorial Library & Museum in Washington, CT. Prior to that she was the archival assistant at the College of the Holy Cross and collections and interpretation assistant at Adirondack Experience: The Museum on Blue Mountain Lake. Corinne received her MLIS from Kent State University and her BA in Archeological Studies from the State University of New York College at Potsdam.

LISA M. VILLA is the digital scholarship librarian at the College of the Holy Cross. She manages CrossWorks, the institutional repository for Holy Cross, supports scholarly communication services and programs, and assists with efforts for outreach and engagement. Having held a variety of positions in the Holy Cross Libraries, she is excited to work more closely with the Archives and Distinctive Collections department as their digital initiatives expand. Lisa received her MLIS from the University of Rhode Island and her BA from the College of the Holy Cross.