
Mercy International Association



Standards for Mercy Archives

2008

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Introduction

These “Standards for Mercy Archives” have been drawn up and approved for the care of the Collection owned by the Mercy International Association (MIA) and deposited at Mercy Congregational Archives, Herbert Street, Dublin, Ireland. They are also proposed by the MIA, on the advice of the MIA Archives Committee, as a set of helpful standards or best practices which could beneficially guide the functioning of all Mercy Archives worldwide.

As all Mercy Archivists and researchers are aware, the worldwide Mercy archives hold the rich treasures of much of the intellectual property of the Sisters of Mercy of the world. These archives are precious “places of memory,” preserving many important details in the history of the Sisters of Mercy and the Catholic Church. As such, they are, in a sense, irreplaceable storehouses of pastoral knowledge and even renewal, providing information on the evolution of liturgy and forms of prayer, the sanctity of holy lives, the development of works of the apostolate, events in social history, the evolving shapes of religious governance structures, ecclesial friendships and conflicts, the character and personality of ecclesiastical leaders, and countless other topics. From this carefully preserved information researchers and others can glean insights not only into the past arrangements, but also into present understandings, and future renewal of the mission of the Church and of the Sisters of Mercy and their co-workers. The Pontifical Commission for the Cultural Heritage of the Church has beautifully articulated these possibilities in its document: *The Pastoral Function of Church Archives* (February 2, 1997).

Through these “Standards for Mercy Archives,” the Mercy International Association affirms these goals and ideals in the hope that they will be observed in Mercy Archives throughout the world. The Association further hopes that the respective Mercy Archivists will not only devote their efforts to the best practices

described below, but will also understand that their archival labor is indeed an essential ministry in the Church, and one that is deeply appreciated by all Sisters of Mercy.

A. Purpose

The purpose of any Mercy Archive is to acquire, protect, preserve, and make available to researchers and others, as needed, the documents and other artifacts in its holdings. Such access will conform to the archive's legitimate responsibilities in the areas of preservation, conservation, privacy protection, confidentiality, and protection of intellectual property

B. Management

The proper and successful management of a Mercy Archive involves careful and consistent attention to the following specific responsibilities:

1. Acquisitions

It is extremely important that each Mercy Archive have a clear, widely published policy of active acquisition of all material of archival value within its purview and not presently in current use. Such a policy—proactive, not passive in nature—will detail the types of acquisitions the Archive wishes to receive, the times and manner of collection, and other pertinent information including any necessary agreements with donors of materials. The policy will also include reference to the topics in the following outline:

a. Principles and Methods of Acquisition

The policy will address agreements with donors, including respect for their legitimate wishes and/or interests; assurances of proper provenance of deposited materials; and the procedures in place (or to be put in place) to prevent loss of the personal or corporate privacy of donors. In particular, the policy will indicate when, how, and by whom the materials found in the quarters of a sister who is seriously ill or has died will be evaluated as to their archival value and, where appropriate,

transferred to the Archive.

b. Types of Acquisitions Sought

- i. annals
- ii. correspondence
- iii. manuscripts
- iv. oral interviews
- v. obituaries
- vi. administration records
- vii. personal papers
- viii. audio-visual records
- ix. records in electronic form
- x. other materials

c. Requested Donors

- i. congregations
- ii. regional/provincial units
- iii. convents
- iv. individual sisters (personal papers)
- v. sponsored ministries
- vi. dioceses
- vii. other religious congregations
- viii. families and friends
- ix. other relevant donors

2. Processing (or re-processing) of Acquisitions, according to arrangement levels and genre (type) descriptions.

- a. Determining the provenance (“person or office [organization] of origin”) and the genre (type) of each item/document, while respecting the original order of the materials.
- b. Arranging the materials within the larger, expandable scheme of the archives, using standard archival arrangement categories or levels:

- i. collection (an accumulation of papers brought together on the basis of some common characteristic)
 - ii. series, and sub-series
 - iii. file unit
 - iv. document (item)
- c. Preparing a detailed, accurate description of each item.
- d. Coordinating (merging) the arrangements and the descriptions in a single system, articulated in:
 - i. the in-house descriptive list (or catalogue), and
 - ii. the various finding aids for researchers.
- e. Periodically examining and updating the arrangements, descriptions, catalogue, and finding aids to reflect new acquisitions, losses, and corrections of fact.

3. Care of the Archival Materials: Preservation Principles

- a. Purpose
The purpose of this section of the “Standards” is to state guiding principles for the preservation activities of Mercy Archives worldwide, including Mercy Congregational Archives, Dublin, which houses the Collection of the Mercy International Association.¹ These guiding principles include the following:

¹The Mercy International Association Collection was established in 1992 to mark the establishment of the Mercy International Centre in 64A Baggot Street, formerly St. Catherine’s Convent, the first house of the congregation built by Catherine McAuley.

The Mercy International Association Collection of Papers relating to Catherine McAuley and Early Sisters of Mercy 1778-1870 was transferred by the Mercy International Association to Mercy Congregational Archives in July 2002.

The collection consists of papers relating to Catherine McAuley (1778-1841), founder of the Sisters of Mercy, papers relating to early Sisters of Mercy to 1870, papers relating to the spiritual, constitutional and administrative development of the congregation to 1870, papers relating to subsequent research into the life of Catherine McAuley and papers relating to the promotion of the Cause of Catherine McAuley in the early to mid 20th century including the research papers of Rev. John MacErlean SJ, Postulator of the Cause of Catherine McAuley.

In accepting custody of this collection, Mercy Congregational Archives assumes responsibility for its preservation. Mercy Congregational Archives includes in its preservation strategy all those activities which will contribute to the survival of the collection by counteracting the effects of age, poor quality original materials, inadequate storage, poor environmental conditions, frequent use and handling.

- i. Storing the records in appropriate and secure accommodation to include environmentally controlled and monitored space, enclosures that conform to archival standards, security, pest management and disaster preparedness.
- ii. Doing everything possible to minimize damage to the collection from handling and use. It will promote good practice in manual handling and provide suitable safeguards to protect the documents while in use.
- iii. Withdrawing documents from public access when they are deemed to be at risk from handling.
- iv. Making surrogates available when the condition of the originals is unstable, or when current or anticipated use will pose a threat to their survival.
- v. Making copies available from photocopies, scanned copies and copy photographs where any such surrogates exist. In this way, copies can be made without risk of damage to the originals.
- vi. Reserving the right to refuse to copy any item where there is an unacceptable risk of damage.
- vii. Exhibiting documents from the collection only when appropriate. Where documents are deemed at risk from exhibition, appropriate surrogates will be used.
- viii. Undertaking and commissioning conservation work on documents deemed to have intrinsic value or special needs. In undertaking such work priority will be given to the stabilization of damage; detailed conservation work will be reserved for documents of exceptional historical, symbolic or physical value or interest, and for records required for exhibition.

- ix. Ensuring that preservation and conservation action taken on behalf of the collection will be in accordance with nationally recognized and agreed ethical and technical standards.

4. **Conditions of Access to the Collections:**²

- a. Researchers must apply in writing to the archivist for permission to consult the collection. A photo identification may be required.
- b. Access is by appointment only.
- c. Access is subject to the regulations for use of the reading room and a signed agreement thereto.
- d. All research conducted in the archives will be carried out under the direct control and supervision of the archives staff.
- e. Documents made available to researchers will not be marked or interfered with in any way and will be returned upon completion of use in their original order and condition to the archivist.
- f. Material in fragile condition will generally be made available in copy form only.
- g. No copies of record will be made without the specific permission

² The MIA collection consists of personal papers and printed material donated to the Mercy International Centre by the Sisters of Mercy of Dublin and other Mercy congregations. It covers the period from 1778 to 1870 and includes: part of the correspondence of Catherine McAuley and some of her spiritual writings; papers relating to the development of the first Rule and Constitutions of the Sisters of Mercy; printed books used by Catherine McAuley and her companions; correspondence of contemporaries of Catherine McAuley and early founders and sisters including, Mother Cecilia Marmion, Mother de Pazzi Delaney, Mother of Mercy Norris, Mother Magdalen Kirwan, Mother Vincent Whitty, Mother Clare Moore, Sister Clare Augustine Moore, Mother Elizabeth Moore, Mother Francis Warde, Mother Ursula Frayne, and Mother Xavier Maguire. The collection also includes papers relating to the Cause of Catherine McAuley from the 1930s, principally the research papers of Rev. John MacErlean SJ, Postulator of the Cause.

Mercy International Association is committed to the promotion of scholarly research and welcomes research use of the MIA collection. The MIA collection is open to bona fide researchers subject to the usual conditions.

of the archivist. Such copying will be subject to the physical condition of the material and to copyright legislation.

- h. A fee for reproduction of material may apply at a standard rate.
- i. Beyond reasonable 'fair use' the researcher will apply in writing to the archivist for permission to reproduce or to quote from documents in future publications by the researcher. If publication is approved, then its source must be acknowledged and the correct reference given.
- j. A copy of any publication containing reproductions of or quotations from documents in the collection will be deposited in the archives.
- k. The archivist reserves the right to refuse admission to the archives.
- l. Email enquiries will be responded to at the discretion of the archivist.

5. Outreach Collaboration

Collaboration with and cooperation in repository surveys conducted by legitimate outside agencies—e.g., Mercy International Association, or national archival associations, networks of women religious, or women's history projects—are, when reasonably requested, a worthy characteristic of a well-functioning Mercy Archive.

- 6. For the proper functioning of a Mercy Archive, adequate annual funds should be sought from and received from the sponsoring group for the following archival needs:
 - a. Personnel adequate to maintain archival standards in the day-to-day operation of the Archive, including technical support, to

- permit reasonable access to researchers.
- b. Adequate space, security, and maintenance.
- c. Preservation/Conservation activities and supplies.
- d. Preparation and updating of arrangements, descriptions, catalogue, and finding aids.
- e. Publications at the discretion of the archivist.
- f. Collaboration and cooperation with other legitimate agencies (see 5 above).
- g. Accessioning new acquisitions.
- h. Professional development of archival staff.

7. Copyright

- a. General Principles:
 - i. Copyright is a protection that covers published and unpublished literary, scientific and artistic works, whatever the form of expression, provided such works are fixed in a tangible, material form.
 - ii. Copyright has two main purposes:
 - (a) The protection of the author's and owner's right to obtain commercial benefit from valuable work.
 - (b) The protection of the author's and owner's general right to control how a work is used.
 - iii. The person who actually creates the new work is the original copyright owner. People may transfer their copyright to another owner. A valid transfer generally requires a signed writing or other historical evidence of transfer.
 - iv. Copyright laws grant the creator or copyright owner (if other than the creator) the exclusive right to reproduce,

prepare derivative works, distribute, perform and display the work publicly.

- v. The proper way to place a copyright notice is as follows: Copyright © (first date of creation) (name of owner). For example, like this: Copyright © 2003 Mercy International Association.
- vi. Copyright lasts the lifetime of an author and a fixed number of years after her death (the number determined by national law) unless transferred to a living person or organization.

b. Mercy International Association Guidelines

- i. The art and literary work of Mercy International Association and other Mercy Archives is an inspiration for contemporary and future Mercy mission.
- ii. It is Mercy International Association's right and the right of other Mercy Archives to place the copyright © symbol next to its name.
- iii. As soon as Mercy International Association or any Mercy Archive creates or acquires copyright ownership of an 'original' work that is 'fixed', Mercy International Association or the other Mercy Archive gets copyright protection automatically.
- iv. Upon written request and with written permission and proper attribution, specific items of copyrighted property of Mercy International Association or another Mercy Archive may be used for information and for non-commercial purposes directly related to the Sisters of Mercy.
 - a. To further the ministries of the Sisters of Mercy
 - b. To advertise MIA, MIC or any Mercy

- congregation or regional unit
- c. As part of a display concerning Sisters of Mercy
- d. For development purposes for any Mercy congregation or regional unit
- v. Anybody who uses, copies or distributes material of Mercy International Association or any Mercy Archive in any manner, for commercial or personal purposes, without Mercy International Association's or the Mercy Archive's written permission, is committing an infringement of copyright.
- vi. If Mercy International Association or the Mercy Archive detects a violation of copyright by another individual or entity, MIA or the Mercy Archive is entitled to assert a claim.

8. Forms

All Mercy Archives will be well served by having available for researchers and donors a set of short forms which can be presented for use and/or signature by the responsible agent(s) at various stages in archival operation or research. These may include detailed forms covering the following archival activities:

- a. Requesting Donation of Material to the Archives.
- b. Making Donation of Materials to the Archives.
- c. Consent Form for Oral Archival Interviews.
- d. Requesting Access to the Archives.
- e. Conditions of Access to the Archives.
- f. Reading Room Regulations.
- g. Document Retrieval (i.e. temporary recall by the person or group donating the archival item(s)).
- h. Photocopy Regulations.

- i. Requesting Photocopies of Material in the Archives.
- j. Requesting Permission to Use or Publish, in whole or in part, Copyright Material.
- k. Agreement for Long- or Short-Term Loans.
- l. Authorization of Use of Copyright Material.
- m. Photograph Release.
- n. Noting the Need for Conservation of Particular Material.
- o. Noting Errors or Gaps in Archival Notations.
- p. Recall.
- q. Other Forms that are needed or useful.