Report of the Archivist 2016-2017

Changes in your diocesan archives: in 2013, prior to the relocation of the offices in 2014, we cataloged each collection in a database. For ease of access, we developed “collection designations” based upon barcodes identifying collections’ locations in our new vault in Meriden. The new vault, thankfully, is situated on the third floor with the rest of the office staff but with less space than the previous archives. Because of space considerations, with the advice of the Archives Committee and the approval of the Bishop and Chancellor, we had to make crucial decisions about donating some of our important collections, the disposition of which was included in previous reports. We donated these collections to the Episcopal Archives in Austin, Yale libraries and Yale Divinity School, institutions with high visibility.

I answered two hundred reference questions, mostly by e-mail and telephone, ranging from inquiries of sacramental records to the histories of parishes and organizations. We welcomed a dozen visitors for research, and I enjoyed assisting with the exhibit for Camp Washington’s centennial celebration. I continued to describe and consolidate collections. Two more parishes closed: St. John’s Church in Sandy Hook and St. Andrew’s Church in New Haven sent their parish registers and papers to the archives for processing. In all, we added approximately 15 linear feet of records to the database and shelves. The closed parish registers come to the diocesan archives so that they are available for people to inquire about their sacramental records. I traveled to Little Compton, Rhode Island, to collect Bishop Hastings’ sermons and some papers. A powerful preacher, the Episcopal College of Preachers established an annual conference in his honor. We accepted some significant donations this year including three volumes from Mr. A.C. Stuart Donald, Keeper of the Aberdeen Diocesan Library and Honorary Archivist. As you know, Connecticut has strong ties to that diocese.

We processed the Mission Development Initiative files, and the minutes of boards and commissions as we do on a continuing basis. Additional materials from organizations continue to come in. Time spent archiving electronic publications increases monthly. Both physical and digital space continue to challenge, because archives are not static: they grow, yet our mission is to collect, protect and preserve our history. We also collect books by Connecticut Episcopal authors, both clergy and lay, so please keep the diocesan library in mind when you publish.
Around the diocese: a parish accomplishment of note this past year is the publication of a very beautiful history of the historic Trinity on the Green in New Haven, and I commend their history web page to you. The history ministry performed research primarily in their own archives for this project. They will host the National Episcopal Historians and Archivists Conference in 2018. Perhaps other parishioners would like to expand their archives programs by working with a group of like-minded people. If your church has a parish history that is not on the shelves of our diocesan library, please donate it. Your faith story is important. Looking forward, my hope is that ECCT will archive more fully the activities and achievements of the mission work of the laity of ECCT: its regional activities and missional experiments among the emerging networks of our Church in Connecticut.

I would like to take this time to make two recommendations to parishes: the first, as Father Carroon always asked, that parishes submit architectural drawings to the diocesan archives to have copies off site in case of an emergency. Also, with regard to the retention of business and financial files, consult the Episcopal Archives web page for those rules.

Of course, the "crowning glory" of this year has been the restoration of Samuel Seabury’s mitre. The Bishops and Canons decided to restore this beautiful and historic object because it is a “first” in many respects. You can find a history of the manufacture and whereabouts of the mitre since its creation in 1786 on the ECCT web site. The Living Church featured this story as well.

Finally, the trust given to me to catalog and to care for this significant and unique 150-year-old collection is humbling. Past archivists and historiographers have shaped the collections to reveal the lives and times of the bishops as well as the religion, history, culture, organizations, social outreach and mission of the Church in Connecticut from the 18th century to the present day. We are fortunate to inherit such rich archives. I am grateful for the support of the bishops and canons and especially to our archives support network: The Rev. Dr. Andrew Zeman, Ms. Diana Barnard, The Rev. Steven Ling, Ms. Evelyn Green, The Rev. Dr. Borden Painter and The Rev. Cn. Robert G. Carroon, former archivist and present historiographer for the Episcopal Church in Connecticut. They have all given generously and graciously of their time and talent in the service of the legacy of the whole Church in Connecticut.
For me, it is a joy and a blessing to work with the splendid diocesan staff whom I call my colleagues and friends.

Respectfully submitted,

Margaret Smith