

**C**ELEBRATING  
**T**HE **G**IFT OF  
**F**AITH

Guidelines for  
Celebrating,  
Documenting,  
and Writing  
the History of a  
Community of Faith

ARCHDIOCESE OF SEATTLE  
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1999

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Contact:  
Christine Taylor  
Archivist/Records Manager  
Archdiocese of Seattle  
910 Marion St.  
Seattle, WA 98104

Phone: (206) 382-4857  
E-mail: [archives@seattlearch.org](mailto:archives@seattlearch.org)  
Internet: [www.seattlearch.org/archives](http://www.seattlearch.org/archives)

Design and layout by J. Norman Dizon

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

The celebration of anniversaries which evoke in a particular way Christ's love for us stirs in our souls not only a sense of gratitude but also a sense of the need to "proclaim the wonders of God," to evangelize.

*Ecclesia in America*  
Pope John Paul II  
Apostolic Exhortation  
January 22, 1999

THE CELEBRATION OF ANY ANNIVERSARY, whether it is 10 years or 100 years, is an opportunity for a community to reflect on the past, acknowledge the present, and look toward the future. It is an opportunity for a community to notice and celebrate its unique character and its connection to the larger Church. An anniversary is an opportunity to reach out to other faith traditions, secular organizations, and the wider community, and to strengthen ties and share the significance of the event.

The purpose of this publication is to provide parishes, faith communities, schools and other archdiocesan institutions the resources to plan and implement an anniversary celebration. A celebration includes not only a singular event, but projects that will result in a permanent legacy, such as writing a history, establishing a heritage room, or creating an archives. This publication is meant to initiate ideas and activities at the local level and provide standards in terms of gathering, writing,



and documenting community history. It is recommended that when the planning process for an anniversary celebration begins, the archdiocesan archivist/records manager be contacted for assistance.

## PREPARATION

ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS and related special events and projects will not succeed without proper institutional support and resources. Initial steps for such support include:

- Outlining the scope of the project
- Identifying the audience(s)
- Stating the purpose
- Drafting a preliminary budget
- Creating a project summary

These are taken to the appropriate administrative staff or councils for discussion and approval. Note that the audience and purpose must be clearly identified early in the planning process, and that the available resources and the social and cultural environment of the community will determine the style and substance of the celebration. For instance, a celebration may include a series of projects and events united by a single theme and produced over a period of time; or a celebration may include a Mass, reception, and an anniversary publication.

### PLANNING

Once approval has been granted, particular goals and objectives may be framed and a budget prepared. Lines of accountability and responsibility for the creation, implementation, and future direction of anniversary projects or events are to be established. If a project is being implemented by committee, the committee is to create a mission statement that reflects the scope, goals and objectives of the project and is to connect specific responsibilities to long and short term goals. Committee

work must also include identification and assessment of the gifts and skills of each committee member and the assignment of duties accordingly.

It is also important to identify what projects or individual responsibilities will continue after the event(s) have taken place. For instance, a parish, faith community, school, or other institution may choose to create a “heritage room” for a celebratory event. Plans would therefore include the requirements necessary to dismantle, modify and/or maintain the display in the future.

Planning also includes the creation of a work strategy or timeline. Choose a realistic end date for the project and plot intermediate deadlines back from that date. Keep the timeline in sight or on hand. Quarterly or monthly updates on plans and activities published in the bulletin or newsletter may assist in keeping committee activities on track.

#### BUDGET

The budget must be realistic and reflect the resources of the community as well as of the committee members. It is safe to assume that much of the celebration will be the result of volunteer efforts. In addition to drawing on the talents of the parish, faith community, or school, the committee may also call on neighboring businesses, churches, and other organizations to donate time, money, or talent. Early in the process a decision is to be made concerning the sale of products such as T-shirts, mugs, special publications, and other memorabilia to offset costs. Budgetary considerations must also be given to projects such as an historical display or the establishment of an archives that will continue after the final event has taken place.

A significant amount of time and effort will be put into the planning stages of any occasion. That time and effort will be rewarded through the celebration of the event, the implementation of projects and programs associated with the event, and the preservation of any products of the celebration for the future.

## 3 CELEBRATION

THE CELEBRATION OF THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE of the establishment of a parish, faith community, school, or other institution may take many directions and is therefore planned to suit the community's needs. Thus, a celebration may be a party, a series of lectures, the publication of a written history, the production of oral or video-taped interviews, or the establishment of an archives. The following list of ideas and activities is offered for consideration when making plans. Note that any member of the community may be involved in any of these ideas, from school-aged to senior parishioners.

*Establish an archives.* Appoint an archives committee to assist the institution's archivist with arranging, describing, and preserving the community's historical and permanent records.

*Write or update a written history.* Appoint a history committee to research, write and publish the history of the parish, faith community, school or other institution. This activity often becomes the catalyst for creating an archives.

*Publish a directory, a yearbook, a brochure.* Write brief biographies of significant laity, clergy or religious who have served the community. Publish historical articles for the local paper, the parish or faith community bulletin, or the school newsletter.

*Conduct oral history interviews.* Interview individuals who have had significant impact on the community. Provide an atmosphere of welcome and inclusion that will invite those whose stories have not been told to be involved. Arrange for the transcription and placement of the interviews in the archives. Use excerpts from interviews in

articles, as part of the historical narrative, or in display labels.

*Videotape or photograph significant events and historical interviews.* Assign responsibility for documenting these occasions to an individual or group.



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Confirmation picnic at Port Angeles with Bp. Aegidius Junger (far right), 1895

*Create an historical display, heritage room, or photo gallery.* Constitute a committee to design and implement the display, and to plan its future disposition and care.

*Arrange historical lectures.* Invite local historians, teachers, previous principals, pastors, chaplains, or others to speak at a more formal occasion. Use the opportunity for a fundraising reception.

*Produce a series of musical recitals.* Invite local community musicians, choirs, vocalists, bands, to participate. Plan an organ recital.

*Design church art and architecture tours.* Pay attention to the symbolism in stained glass, statues, and other liturgical materials. Include a discussion about the role of the Altar Guild. Create a lesson plan for religious formation classes about Catholic art and artifacts.

*Promote the anniversary.* Produce banners, posters, and other memorabilia to commemorate the event. Advertise in the local newspaper. Consider what to give back to the community on this occasion.

*Hold receptions.* Use the anniversary as an occasion to host a series of receptions, teas, or other special meals, that bring together various groups in the community for a particular reason. Plan a reception for all oral interviewees; plan a formal tea for former teachers; involve alumni with the eighth grade graduation breakfast; coordinate a multi-cultural food festival.

*Utilize modern technology.* Create a multi-media presentation of the history of the community. Use digital cameras and video equipment, computer software, and scanners, in creative and useful ways. Involve students.

*Schedule an anniversary liturgy.* Include in the discussion music, presentation of the gifts, special intercessions. Honor senior parishioners. Invite the Archbishop, the Dean, previous pastors, religious and lay leaders, and former teachers. Plan the event to include local businesses and worshipping communities of other faiths. Document this event.

## 4 LEGACY

A SIGNIFICANT WAY TO COMMEMORATE the past is to leave something for the future. This may be accomplished in a number of creative ways, and includes writing or updating a parish, school, or community history; organizing an oral history program; documenting the historical events of the community; and preserving significant historical materials.

### WRITING LOCAL RELIGIOUS HISTORY

Writing local history may be accomplished by a committee or by an individual. Specific responsibilities such as research, writing, layout, publication, and distribution may be assigned to specific individuals. Planning, identification of objectives, knowledge of the audience, and strong research and editing will result in a product that will be valued and useful in the future.

#### *A. Research*

Carefully prepared research provides a solid foundation for a well written product. Consider the community's beginnings, paths of development, and its current mission. As these paths are connected an overall picture of the community will begin to form, not in isolation, but as part of a larger secular and a larger religious community. Demographic shifts shape the development of an area as well; consider also the social, political, cultural, and economic changes of the neighborhood and region. Finally, consider how to recount the story of a particular community of faith. How does the history of a religious institution reveal spiritual growth, development, and renewal of community?

Research may move from the general to the specific — from the history of the Catholic Church in the United States, to the history of Catholicism in the Northwest, to the history of the local community. Appropriate secondary source materials include Catholic encyclopedias, publications relating to the development of the Catholic church in the United States, and other books relating to local or regional religious and Catholic history. Primary source materials are found in parish archives, (arch)diocesan archives, local or state historical societies, museums, and special collections in university, county and city libraries.

Primary sources are materials such as newspaper clippings, bulletins, correspondence, minutes, reports, directories, etc. Important documents to review include mission statements and the goals and objectives of a community and its organizations. Photographs, ephemeral materials such as playbills and flyers for special events, and scrapbooks are other primary sources that add dimension to a research project. Locating many of these materials may present a challenge; in many cases, records of guilds, councils, and societies are still in the hands of board members. Once these records are located, the researcher has an opportunity to promote the appropriate placement or donation of the records into the parish, community, school or archdiocesan archives.

Research data is to be collected and evaluated. It is very important to take clear and accurate notes, to document sources, and to verify facts. Attention to detail assists in tracking completed research, particularly if many are researching and one is writing. Notes may be collected on 3"x 5" or 4"x 6" cards, in a specific notebook, or on disk. Whatever the format, these notes form the basis of the history to be written. Careful note taking is as important for the project at hand as it is for the future. Research

documentation and source citations are the historical record of the project itself and become a vital part of the parish, school, or community archives. These materials cannot be lost.

Any product of the research belongs to the community and not to any one individual. It is important that committee members understand and acknowledge that anything gathered and created as the result of their efforts belongs to the parish, faith community, school, or institution for which it is accomplished. Thus, no individual enjoys copyright. However, if a decision is made to use photographs, artifacts, personal papers or other materials that belong to an individual, permission must be granted by the owner and the appropriate citations made.

#### *B. Evaluation and inclusion of oral histories*

The recording of life stories is appealing and informative. Conducting and evaluating interviews within the historical process is problematic, but in many cases the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Oral histories spark interest and reveal common threads of a faith tradition. In many cases, recognition of the value of oral tradition and its purpose provides a venue for inclusion and education. Formal and informal interviews often communicate what is difficult to document; that is, the work of the Spirit in the lives of the Christian faithful. Creating an opportunity for individuals to feel comfortable enough to share their story of faith, within the context of the history of their faith community, often illustrates the heart of the community and how it has maintained its identity through time.

Nevertheless, oral histories, personal reflections, and recollections are of secondary value in historical context unless supporting documentary evidence exists. In cultures



where oral tradition is not essential, there is more occasion for memory lapses and/or personal interpretations. It is thus important to verify oral interviews and document sources in the same way paper-based materials are reviewed and evaluated.



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Oral histories can be engaging and stimulating for grade schoolers.

There are several items to gather and develop in order to implement an oral history program and conduct an interview. It is recommended that the archdiocesan archivist/records manager be contacted during the planning phase of an oral history project. Vital to the program are:

- Project statement
- Adequate equipment (recorder, microphone, extension cord, 60-minute tapes, notepad and pencil, questions and notes)
- Legal and administrative forms (release and consent form, interview form, interview summary sheet)

The style and/or type of interview will determine the amount of preparation and steps taken by the interviewer. Whether the interview is formal or informal, whether the recording is a focused recollection or the accounting of a life story, each will affect how the interview is conducted and subsequently utilized.

The interviewer must be cognizant of the history of the region and community prior to the interview. The interviewer is to listen with respect and attention, ask questions that require thoughtful responses, and be aware that a moment of silence does not necessarily need to be filled. An oral history program often develops out of a need to capture the wisdom and stories of individuals who are elderly, who are leaving the community, or who offer a perspective or knowledge of a particular event or program that is unavailable elsewhere. Therefore, interviewers need training in conducting a good interview, creating useful procedures, and managing the disposition of the product.

Once the program is finished, important follow-up tasks relating to the arrangement, description, transcription, and preservation of the tapes need to be completed. This will allow the information to be available to researchers and others requesting access to the materials.

### *C. Historical Narrative*

Once the research has been completed and the documentation and resources gathered, the process of writing the history begins. The first steps of this process include reviewing the intended audience and the goal of the publication and making decisions regarding the style and type of the publication. The goals of the publication may be to teach, inform, evangelize, or entertain. The publication may take the form of a brochure, a directory, a booklet, a yearbook, a pictorial history, a series of bulletin

inserts, etc. The audience or the goal will determine the style of publication.

The establishment of context and voice are critical in writing an interesting narrative. Clearly define the beginning of the community, e.g., first Mass, groundbreaking, dedication of church, etc., and determine an appropriate end point, e.g., the end term of the previous pastor, a recent renovation, etc. Researching and writing about events that have occurred 75 years ago requires a different approach than does interpreting more recent or current events. If the methodology is sound, the writing style may be informal and will appeal to a broader audience. A common way to write history is through the use of chronology, but a narrative approach is more thought provoking.

The history of a parish, faith community, school or other religious institution must present a balanced account of the past. Clergy, men and women religious, and laity played significant roles in the development of a community. It is most helpful to maintain a broad scope and identify as many groups that contributed to the growth of the local church as possible. Composition may include categories such as: mission and goals; physical environment (parish plant, neighborhood, region, etc.); individuals (clergy, laity, religious); organizations and institutions within the community (Knights of Columbus, St. Vincent de Paul Society, Holy Names Society, Legion of Mary, Parents Club, etc.); special occasions or annual events; education and outreach (formation programs, sacramental preparation, office structure, etc.); change and tension; significant programs or accomplishments.

The narrative should leave the reader with a clear idea of the growth and development of the community and how

it has reached its present character. Thus it is important to include such topics as the origins and purpose of the community; changes in organizational structure, staff and focus; demographic shifts; and regional and historical contexts. If the narrative concerns a parish, additional topics would include shifts in canonical status (mission, station, etc.); role of the school; role of women religious; role of clergy (religious or diocesan); and role of laity.

#### *D. Format*

The following elements are suggested format standards for a history of a parish, faith community, or school or other institution:

- Title page
- Dedication
- Preface/Acknowledgements (include author[s] and date)
- Letter from the Archbishop
- Letter from the Pastor
- Table of Contents
- Body of work
- Appendices
- Lists of clergy, laity, men and women religious
- Timeline
- Other statistics as necessary
- Bibliography
- Photographs (include citations)

Other format decisions are the inclusion and/or placement of advertisements, and the inclusion of endnotes or footnotes.

### F. Revisions

The first draft is prepared and a format chosen. The product is sent to an editor. If possible, the individual responsible for editing should not have been part of the research or the writing process. It is necessary for the editor to have some distance from the previous work in order to effectively review the product. At the same time, any changes or suggestions made by the editor are to be considered in the same impartial manner. The editor is to review the format, narrative, and sources for any gaps and discrepancies, and review the product for overall appearance and consistency. Once reviewed, an edited copy is to be sent to the committee or individual who will authorize publication.

### PRESERVATION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALS

Writing a community history often requires a journey into uncharted territory. In many cases, researchers find primary source materials that previously have not been gathered or used. It is up to the individual or committee to document, arrange, and describe the materials that have been gathered during that exploration. Creating an archives, or donating research materials to an already existing repository, is as challenging and rewarding as any other steps in leaving a lasting legacy. Assistance is available to a community that continues in this direction—the archdiocesan archivist provides resources, workshops, and on-site assistance for those interested in pursuing this course.

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Overview of Northwest Catholic History [fact sheet]

Archdiocese of Seattle Chronology, 1774-1975 [fact sheet]

Catholic Northwest History Bibliography

To order publications or to receive further information about programs and services mentioned within contact Christine Taylor, Archivist/Records Manager, Archdiocese of Seattle, (206) 382-4857 or e-mail [archives@seattlearch.org](mailto:archives@seattlearch.org).



## Notes