Greetings All,

I hope all is well in your places of work and service!

I hope this winter season is treating you well, and that your repositories are humming with activity. I know mine surely is! I often think that as archivists of religious collections, we have more variety in our work than any other archivist does, which I consider to be a good thing. We work extensively with the creators of our records, as well as the researchers who want to study them for the current and historical insights they provide. And in every case, the larger significance of religion for an individual or a society hovers over our collections.

The variety in our work can also create challenges, at times. Many of us are one-person shops, and yet we need to be able to perform all the tasks expected in an up-to-date archival facility. We develop local, regional, and national partnerships in order to carry out these tasks within the greater expertise of the group. We push forward in making our collections accessible, while keeping in mind the missions of our parent organizations, all while attempting to keep up with current research trends in religious studies. Pat yourself on the back!

I recently took a look at the 2017 contents of Review of Religious Research, and found that religious scholars are writing about a variety of topics, with multiple articles representing a few timely ones. Not surprisingly, there were at least six articles discussing politics and religion, with five addressing racial and ethnic religious groups. Three brought up issues of gender and sexuality in religion, while three others touched on the Muslim faith. The remainder covered the intersection of religion with social topics such as economics, social action, discrimination, and tolerance.

All of us hold collections that might contribute, in one way or another, to the religious research currently being done. This is important work, and I find myself aspiring to renew my outreach efforts, as I hope you will find the time and inclination to do as well!

Best Regards,

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$385,205 Awarded to Philadelphia’s Historic Congregations

Submitted by Carol Smith, Archivist
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The Council on Library and Information Resources has awarded a “Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives” grant in the amount of $385,205 to a project that will digitize over 41,000 records from the archives of Philadelphia’s oldest congregations and aggregate them in a database accessible to the public. Ranging in date from 1708 to 1870, the documents provide more clues to the relationship between religion and politics in the colonial era than any other published body of work.

Since the days of William Penn’s religious experiment, Philadelphia has encouraged the cooperation of different faith groups, a tradition honored by this initiative. Entitled “Digitizing the Records of Philadelphia’s Historic Congregations: Providing Documentation for the Political, Social and Cultural Developments in Philadelphia,” the project connects records from the archives of Christ Church, St. George’s Methodist Church, Gloria Dei, Mikveh Israel, African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas, Episcopal Dioceses Archives, Presbyterian Historical Society, St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, and American Baptist Historical Society. Spearheaded by Christ Church Preservation Trust, this proposal was one of only 14 selected from 125 applications.

“This is a wonderful gift for scholars interested in Philadelphia history, family historians, students and educators, as it will make available for the first time in a unified place the often overlooked records of Philadelphia’s early and diverse congregations,” says Carol Smith, Christ Church archivist.

Due to technological and funding limitations, much of the congregational information has remained “hidden,” inaccessible to the public. The records for digitization include baptisms, marriages and burials, meeting minutes and correspondence -- documents that act as transcripts of a time before “official” record keeping. The papers, some of which have been held in remote archives, provide further details on topics such as the role of the church in free and enslaved African communities from the mid 1700’s through the Civil War, the rise of new religious denominations, and the diversity of religious thought in the colonial metropolis of Philadelphia.

“Digitizing the Records of Philadelphia’s Historic Congregations” builds upon a Christ Church pilot project launched in 2014 by incorporating technology that allows the tagging of different data within one document, an act that enhances the searchability of records. Unlike other major genealogy sites, this project will make research information free and easily accessible.
to an international audience. After undergoing scanning at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia’s Regional Digital Imaging Center, the data will be discoverable through the ATLA Digital Library, the American Theological Library Association’s religion and theology digital collections portal and OPenn, the University of Pennsylvania Libraries Open Data Portal.

Fig. 3. Detail of a page from the Sept. 24, 1778, Second Presbyterian congregational, corporation and trustees minutes, commissioning a survey of damage done by the recently departed British Army. Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

About Christ Church Preservation Trust (CCPT): CCPT, a non-religious non-profit organization, was created in 1965 to ensure the maintenance and preservation of a campus of historic properties: Christ Church (founded in 1695), Christ Church Neighborhood House (a community and artistic center), and the Christ Church Burial Ground, all located in the heart of Philadelphia’s historic district.

About the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR): CLIR is an independent, nonprofit organization that forges strategies to enhance research, teaching, and learning environments in collaboration with libraries, cultural institutions, and communities of higher learning. Funding for CLIR’s Digitizing Hidden Collections grant program is provided by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.
“Archiving Antigua” Project at the Moravian Archives

Submitted by Paul M. Peucker, Ph.D.
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Like our colleagues in Philadelphia, the Moravian Archives, Bethlehem received a “Digitizing Hidden Special Collections and Archives” grant from the Council on Library and Information Resources (CLIR). The Moravian Archives received $67,049 from CLIR to support the project “Archiving Antigua: A Digital Record of Pre- and Post-Emancipation Antigua, 1760-1948.”

This funding will support the digitization of over 13,248 pages of manuscript records of the Moravian Church in Antigua, 1760-1948. Already sought in high demand by scholars and Caribbean descendants, materials will be digitized at the Conservation Center for Art and Historic Artifacts (CCAHA). The digitized items will be freely accessible for research via the Digital Library of the Caribbean (dLOC).

The “Archiving Antigua” project is part of a long-range plan to preserve and to make the records from the Moravian Church in the Eastern West Indies accessible. In 1968 these records were transferred to the Bethlehem Archives by the Moravian Church in the Eastern West Indies with the express wish to preserve the records in a controlled environment. A grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) allowed the Moravian Archives to conduct an item-level survey of the 120 linear feet of Caribbean records to assess humanities values and produce condition reports and treatment plans.

Fig. 4. The Eastern West Indies (EWI) Collection, 1732-1999, preserved at the Moravian Archives, Bethlehem, PA.

Last Call for Nominations!
Sister M. Claude Lane, O.P., Memorial Award

The Society of American Archivists’ Awards Committee is seeking nominations for the Sister M. Claude Lane, O.P., Memorial Award. This award recognizes individuals who have made a significant contribution to the field of religious archives. Only individual archivists are eligible for nomination. The award is sponsored by the Society of Southwest Archivists, in conjunction with Society of American Archivists. It is named in honor of Sister M. Claude Lane, the first professionally trained archivist at the Catholic Archives of Texas in Austin, who served there from 1960 until her death in 1974. The award finalist is recognized with a certificate from SAA and a $300 cash prize provided by the Society of Southwest Archivists at the annual Society of American Archivists meeting. More information on the Lane Award, including past winners, nomination criteria and guidelines, is available at http://www2.archivists.org/governance/handbook/section12-lane.

All nominations shall be submitted to the Awards Committee by February 28, 2018. If you have any questions, please contact Jillian Ewalt at ewalt@csus.edu.