



Religious Archives and Shifting Demographics: The Solution of the Vincentians and DePaul University¹

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Readers of *Catholic Library World* may be familiar with DePaul University's commitment to its Vincentian heritage from contributions in the March 2006 and June 2007 issues. Vincent P. Tinerella's articles introduce the Congregation of the Mission in America, DePaul University, and describe the Vincentian Collections in the university library's Special Collections and Archives Department.² Tinerella writes in his 2006 article, "In 2001, the Midwest Province of the Congregation of the Mission entrusted to the care of DePaul the single most significant collection of information relating to the Vincentians in the United States, the DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives."³ This article explores the motives of collaboration between the religious community and the university. It took years before the idea of transferring the archives became a reality, but it is my hope that other religious communities may see this collaboration as a potential model to secure the future of their archives. Another model for the preservation of religious communities' archives is described in an *American Catholic Studies* 2007 article by Tricia T. Pyne.⁴ Unlike the Vincentians who transferred their archives to an existing repository at a Vincentian university, the U.S. Province of the Society of St. Sulpice entered into a collaborative effort with the Archdiocese of Baltimore and St. Mary's Seminary and University, which resulted in the construction of a new state of the art archives facility dedicated in 2002.



Top: Undated engraving, St. Mary's Seminary, Perryville, Missouri; DeAndreis Rosati Memorial Archives, St. Mary's of the Barrens, Oversize.

Above: "We are DePaul 2" DePaul's Lincoln Park Campus, Chicago, Illinois, Photograph by May Claire Glabowicz, c. 2002; Mural painting by Brother Mark Elder, CM, and DePaul students completed in 2001; DePaul University Archives, Art at DePaul, Box 3.



St. Mary's Seminary students, 1896,
DeAndreis Rosati Memorial Archives,
St. Mary's of the Barrens Photographs,
Box 5.

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Many Catholic institutions in the late 1970s and early 1980s were feeling the impact of the Second Vatican Council. A decline in the number of vocations and the departure of many ordained priests from the Roman Catholic Church forced organizations into a period of reassessment and retrenchment. Responding to the renewal called for by Vatican II and facing a shortage of priests, the administration of the Midwest Province of the Congregation of the Mission⁵ embarked on a series of self-studies to evaluate how well their resources (personnel and financial) were truly aligned with the community's mission. Key leaders at DePaul University⁶ recognized that the diminishment of priests in the Province impacted the Vincentian identity of the institution and began to look for ways to ensure that they could maintain this identity, which was a deep source of pride and inspiration. Several Vincentians believed that moving the community archives to a Vincentian academic institution would provide a good solution for both the Midwest Province and DePaul University.

Documents issued during Vatican II (1962-1965) called for communities of religious men and women to review their constitutions. Beginning in 1968, an international assembly of Vincentians met regularly to revise their constitutions, statutes, and norms. The revised Constitutions articulated "the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission is to follow Christ evangelizing the poor." Beginning in the 1990s, superiors of provinces began "mission-focused" strategic planning efforts within their local administrative divisions to comply with instructions from the superior general to determine whether their activities and resources were aligned closely with this mission.

In 1985, the Vincentians of the Midwest Province experienced an extremely difficult chapter in their history, the closing of St. Mary's of the Barrens Seminary, an apostolate that the Vincentians had carried out in Perryville, Missouri, for more than one hundred years. Declining enrollments, lack of vocations to the priesthood, and a change in how the province approached formation of Vincentian priests were all cited as reasons for the closing. St. Mary's served as a powerful historic symbol for community members who claimed strong emotional ties to "this place of our beginnings"⁷ in the United States, and when the seminary closed the Vincentians did not sell their land or cease operations of other services and works that called Perryville home. However, in 1994, the Midwest



Province formed a task force assigned to conduct a self-study known as *Mission Project: St. Mary's of the Barrens*, which evaluated the assets, activities, and personnel still located in Perryville.

Charged with making recommendations for how St. Mary's of the Barrens might best continue to serve the mission of the Midwest Province into the next millennium, task force members were asked to specifically examine the existing works and ministries of the Barrens with a fresh look and clear focus on the province's mission. Based on insights and conclusions provided by the task force, the provincial administration decided that certain services, such as the administration of the community archives were not necessarily connected to St. Mary's, and physical assets such as the seminary library, rare books, art objects, and museum collections were not integral to St. Mary's (and in some instances, not to the province either). Many community members were upset by the classification of their historical collections as "moveable patrimonial assets."⁸ The Superior of St. Mary's, the priest directly responsible for the archives, and community members who had been asked by the Provincial to develop plans for a heritage center on the grounds were angry, hurt, and disappointed with the provincial administration's decision to sell or move these collections. They argued that removing items of historical significance would considerably diminish the heritage of St. Mary's of the Barrens. Desperate for a compromise, the Vincentians in Perryville suggested that the archives could be "computerized onto CDs" so that the originals could remain at St. Mary's. They also maintained that there was a distinction between the community archives and the archives of the house and asked for time to sort the archives accordingly.

Rev. Edward R. Udovic, CM, the Vincentian assigned to advise the provincial and the provincial council on the historical collections or "movable patrimonial assets," submitted an implementation plan to the Provincial Administration in April 1995 in which he recommended collaboration with DePaul University. This plan included carefully-considered ideas designed to help the Vincentians in Perryville accept the transfer of the historically significant collections. The most important point that Fr. Udovic communicated to his fellow Vincentians was that the community was not losing its archives; he wrote, "They are and will remain the sole property of the Province. They are only being moved and

Congregation of the Mission General Assembly, 1968 Rome; DeAndreis Rosati Memorial Archives, General Assembly Records of Midwest Province, Box 5.

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—Dennis McCann
DePaul University
Religious Studies Department

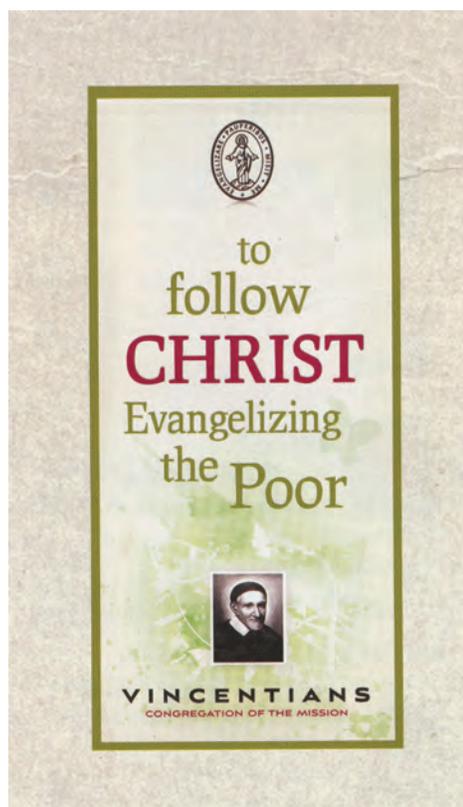


Image from back cover, *Vincentian Apostolates: Congregation of the Mission Western Province 2011*, DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, Reconfiguration Files.

housed at DePaul.”⁹ This clarification of ownership along with an access policy that addressed the length of time certain record groups remained closed to researchers and the agreement to leave the house archives in Perryville may have helped soften the blow felt by the community members in Perryville after learning that their beloved treasures were no longer considered integral to the mission of St. Mary’s.

In the late 1970s, the leadership of DePaul University and the Midwest Province of the Congregation of the Mission began to examine how to ensure a Vincentian presence at DePaul when the number of priests in the Province was diminishing. In the early stages of these discussions the primary focus was on how to fill faculty and top-level positions at the university with Vincentian priests. This issue very quickly became intertwined with conversations about the university’s mission. Committees were formed that focused on the Vincentian and Catholic character of DePaul University. DePaul administrators, Vincentian and lay, understood that the university required a clearly articulated mission in order to distinguish its programs and services from peer institutions. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Vincentians from the Province worked with Vincentians at DePaul to meet the challenge of how to make the university’s Vincentian and Catholic characteristics vital forces in shaping its direction and activities. In the documentation of these discussions there are references to the history of St. Vincent de Paul and the commitment of the university to “share and keep alive his spirit.”¹⁰ Vincentians asked, “When people leave our institutions, do they know they’ve been to a Vincentian school? How does one recognize a Vincentian school? Do they know of St. Vincent de Paul? If they do know, was it because somehow we have been able to give them a sense of what St. Vincent was all about? We have a great and well-founded contemporary mission. Vincent is a part of that, and as his heirs, we work to make his vision alive today.”¹¹ Numerous ideas were circulating in various departments and administrative offices and programs and initiatives were formed to follow up on these ideas to enhance the Vincentian presence at DePaul. Recommendations made by one committee in 1986 included articulating the Vincentian identity with the inclusion of a written statement in university publications; developing orientation programs for trustees, faculty, and staff; organizing service opportunities for the university community to volunteer with the poor and needy; increasing the visual images of St. Vincent de Paul and his works in appropriate places in the university; supporting the expansion of Campus Ministry; and bolstering recruitment of and financial aid for disadvantaged students.¹² There was a very supportive environment for activities that embraced the need to strengthen this part of the university’s identity.

In 1988, the director of the university’s Center for the Study of Values, Dennis McCann (a member of the Religious Studies faculty) decided that the center should take a strong leadership position in the interpretation and renewal of DePaul’s sense of Catholic identity. He wrote that “the key to our Catholic identity lies in the direction of St. Vincent de Paul and if properly understood he may have significant appeal to faculty, staff, and students at this university which bears his name.”¹³ McCann collaborated with professor of Art History Simone Zurawski and university librarians to plan three exhibits and an associated symposium entitled *The Vincentian Mission: From Paris to the Mississippi*, which opened in 1992. He strategically selected the new library being built on DePaul’s Lincoln Park Campus as the site to “project the Vincentian identity of the University in gracious, yet unambiguous terms.”¹⁴ McCann’s contribution to the exhibit and symposium shifted the concept of Vincentian heritage from a sole focus

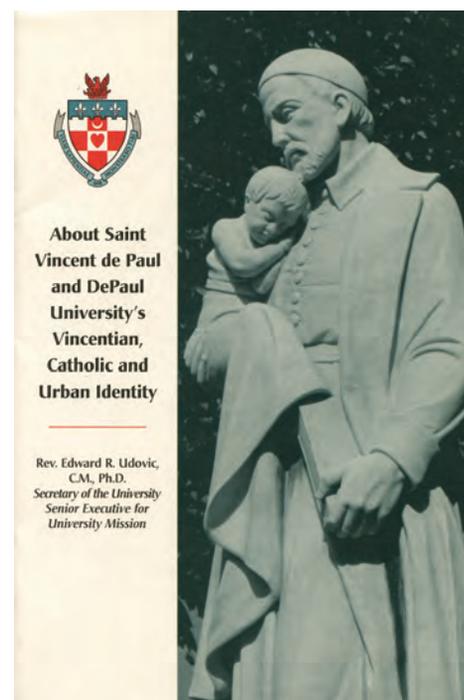
on the life and times of St. Vincent to Vincentians in the United States and their contribution to American Catholicism. Items and documents borrowed for the exhibit from the community archives in Perryville and the Motherhouse in Paris helped to cement the connections between the Vincentian priests who established DePaul in 1898, their pioneering brothers who arrived in the United States in 1816, and the tradition of mission, service, and leadership of the Congregation of the Mission which was founded by Vincent de Paul in 1625.

The Center for the Study of Values' efforts in promoting a greater appreciation of the university's core commitments as an urban, Catholic, and Vincentian institution were recognized and highly valued by the university administration. In 1991, the Center's position within the university's organizational structure was moved from reporting to the dean of the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LA&S) to the executive assistant to the president because the "concerns of the Center extend beyond those of LA&S and touch upon the whole university."¹⁵

The university's Mission Office was another administrative unit that pursued ideas to strengthen DePaul's Vincentian and Catholic identity. In 1996, Fr. Udovic, in his new role as Senior Executive for University Mission, was asked to develop a strategic plan with this particular focus. Some of the objectives outlined in the initial plan circulated to the board of trustees included identity orientation programs, academic courses with a core Catholic/Vincentian component for the curriculum, increased campus-wide artistic displays of Vincentian identity, and a strengthened relationship with the Midwest Province.¹⁶ The move of the Midwest Province's community archives to DePaul could help achieve these objectives because university Mission staff involved with the implementation of said programs could readily access the archives to select historical documents and images to share with the university community at various events and activities. Fr. Udovic also saw the transfer of the archives as part of a larger strategy to create an international Vincentian research center at DePaul. Vincentian scholars and historians supported this vision and, in correspondence to the provincial administration, one Vincentian wrote that the archives would "benefit from a move to an urban, academic environment where they would have adequate care and would be accessible to a wider, scholarly community."¹⁷

A decision by the Midwest Province to lease the building housing the seminary library, museum collections, and community archives to Southeast Missouri State University caused the Vincentians in Perryville to finally realize that the move of their historical collections was going to proceed. On October 27, 2000, the Relocation and Preservation Agreement was signed by the university president and the provincial of the Midwest Province. The agreement stipulates that the Midwest Province retains ownership of the archives in order to fulfill its legal, canonical, and historical responsibilities and that DePaul University accepts the preservation, management, and administration of the archives. The university committed to providing the Midwest Province with rent-free space, the salary for the professional archivist, the professional services of the Special Collections and Archives Department for the storage and maintenance of rare books, and payment for any conservation needed for the rare books. The Midwest Province committed to paying for the move, new shelving, and archival supplies. A Provincial Archives Advisory Committee of three Vincentian priests was established to advise the professional archivist on such issues of access and long-range planning. The university also committed to retaining the formal title of the

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Brochure, *About Saint Vincent de Paul and DePaul University's Vincentian, Catholic and Urban Identity* [c. 2002-2003]; DePaul University Archives, Office of Mission and Values, Box 3.



DePaul History 299 class in Special Collections Reading Room, March 2011, DePaul University Archives Departmental Digital Photographs.

Photograph of St. Vincent's Circle, DePaul's Lincoln Park Campus, Chicago, Illinois, c. 2001 by Professor T. Murphy; Sculpture by Sr. Margaret Beaudett, SC, dedicated in 1995; DePaul University Archives, Art at DePaul, Box 2.



archives, the DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, named in honor of Felix DeAndreis and Joseph Rosati—leaders of the pioneer band of Italian Vincentians who established St. Mary's of the Barrens in 1818.

Since the arrival of the DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives (DRMA) at DePaul in 2001, the primary focus has been to arrange and describe the records, personnel files, and collections in the archives in accordance with professionally accepted standards. Currently, finding aids are mounted on the DePaul University Library website as pdf files. However, the Special Collections and Archives Department is collaborating with other library departments to develop an implementation strategy to contribute Encoded Archival Description (EAD) finding aids to the Catholic Research Resource Alliance, a consortium of Catholic university and seminary libraries. Participation in this consortium will place collection descriptions within a network designed to reach Catholic scholars and hopefully lead to more research about the Vincentians' contribution to the American Catholic Church. The DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives include many compelling voices from the past that are honest about the challenges and rewards of being a Vincentian priest. There are also stories recording the growth, expansion, and decline of seminary education in the United States, as well as numerous examples of strong parish communities from states throughout the Midwest, South, and West. By entrusting the DRMA to DePaul, the Midwest Province has safeguarded the preservation of these voices and stories.

In addition to the traditional uses of the DRMA (genealogical requests and research by Vincentian scholars), new uses for the collections have emerged because of their transfer to DePaul's Special Collections and Archives Department. Faculty members in History and Religious Studies have designed assignments for undergraduates using the archives. This curricular use of the archives fulfills a clearly stated goal of the university's strategic plan to strengthen the Catholic/Vincentian identity of the institution. One very successful assignment designed by a DePaul History professor used a DRMA collection documenting the Vincentian missionary experience in China dating from the 1920s through the 1950s as a "port of entry" for teaching students how to use primary sources.¹⁸ It has been a joy to watch students spend time reading a Vincentian's letters written during

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his time as a missionary priest in China for their research papers and hear them talk about “my priest” after they have formed a bond with him by reading his letters. Recently, a patron shared with me that she cried when she read a letter from a priest’s sister who wrote about her feelings about making her vows as a nun. The patron said that when she was younger she wanted to be a nun and reading the letter was a powerful experience for her.

Each of these encounters between a patron and the archives helps to strengthen the connection between DePaul University and the community of priests and brothers that founded the institution. Fr. Udovic has shared with me that he is keenly aware that there will be a time in the future when there are no longer any Vincentians. For years he has been working to ensure that the legacy of St. Vincent de Paul is not lost when the religious community no longer exists. He and other members of the Vincentian family are transferring the tradition of service, education, and outreach to the poor to the community of lay administrators, faculty, staff, students, and alumni at DePaul in order to preserve and carry on the purpose of the Congregation of the Mission. The relocation of the DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives serves as one part of this vision and the university library’s Special Collections and Archives Department is committed to serve as the custodians of the permanent historical record of the Province.

“With the rapid diminishment of Roman Catholic religious communities in the United States what will happen to their irreplaceable historical records if the community becomes too small or ceases to exist?”¹⁹ As difficult as this reality is for the priests, sisters, and brothers who may have to confront this question, community members should make plans for their records and history. If reconfiguration discussions are taking place, the future of the community archives should be included. Perhaps there isn’t an existing relationship with an academic institution, as was the case with the Midwest Province and DePaul, but what other repositories can serve as the custodians for the archives of a religious community? Archivists at archdiocesan archives, the local college, university, or seminary library, or the local historical society should all be considered potential partners in ensuring that the stories and voices of Catholic religious are preserved and accessible. It would be a tragedy to hear that priests or sisters who were so traumatized by the closing of their community threw away their records because they thought that no one cared. Religious and lay archivists and scholars who rely on these collections do care about the future of these archives.

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¹ Article was adapted from a presentation given at Midwest Archives Conference 2012 Annual Meeting in Grand Rapids, Michigan: “End Times or New Life: the Future of Religious Archives,” April 21, 2012.

² Vincent P. Tinerella, “Preserving Catholic Traditions: The Vincentian Collections at DePaul University,” *Catholic Library World*, 76, No. 3 (March 2006): 203-208 and “The Books of the Barrens: St. Mary’s of the Barrens College and Seminary,” *Catholic Library World*, 77, No. 4 (June 2007): 302-310.

³ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁴ Tricia T. Pyne, “The Associated Archives at St. Mary’s Seminary and University: A New Model for Catholic Archives,” *American Catholic Studies*, 118, No. 2 (2007): 69-78.

⁵ The Congregation of the Mission (popularly known as The Vincentians) is a community of Roman Catholic priests and brothers founded by St. Vincent de Paul in 1625 for the evangelization of the poor and the formation of the clergy. Vincentian priests and brothers total over 3000 worldwide and serve in 86 countries, organized into provinces for administrative purposes. Readers should note that in 2010 a reconfiguration of the West, South, and Midwest provinces in the United States into the Western Province took place. However, documents cited in this article refer to the Midwest Province, so the author has chosen to use that administrative term.

⁶ DePaul University is a private university in Chicago, Illinois. Founded by the Congregation of the Mission in 1898, the university is named for St. Vincent de Paul. Enrollment is over 25,000, making DePaul the largest Catholic university in the United States. All eleven university presidents have been Vincentian priests.

⁷ Letter from Rev. Cecil Parres, CM to Rev. William Ward, CM, 9 May 1972, Cecil Parres Provincial Files, Box 8, Folder 3, DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives. Also cited in Rick Janet’s article “The Decline and Fall of Saint Mary’s of the Barrens: A Case Study in the Contraction of an American Catholic Religious Order” Part One, p. 159, *Vincentian Heritage*, Vol XXII, No. 2, 2001.

⁸ Task Force Report to Provincial Council, November 14, 1994, St. Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary Records, Box 61A, Folder 2, also cited in Janet, *op cit*, 177.

⁹ St. Mary’s of the Barrens Implementation Report by Rev. Edward Udovic, CM, April 12, 1995, St. Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary Records, Box 61A, Folder 2, DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, DePaul Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, Illinois.

¹⁰ The Vincentian Character of DePaul University, undated document, Vincentians at DePaul, Box 1, Folder 3, DePaul University Archives, DePaul Special Collections and Archives Department, Chicago, Illinois.

¹¹ Vincentian Ideals in Higher Education, by Rev. John Rybolt, CM, c. 1982, Vincentians at DePaul, Box 1, Folder 4, DePaul University Archives, DePaul Special Collections and Archives Department, Chicago, Illinois.

¹² Audit of Vincentian Presence: Report to the Board of Trustees by Rev. Paul Golden, CM, 1986, Vincentians at DePaul, Box 2, Folder 8, DePaul University Archives.

¹³ Center for the Study of Values Activity and Planning Document 1988 by Dennis McCann, Office of Mission and Values, Box 1, Folder 4, DePaul University Archives.

¹⁴ Activity Report and Planning Document by Dennis McCann and Jack Lane 1990, Office of Mission and Values, Box 1, Folder 6, DePaul University Archives.

¹⁵ Proposal submitted by Rev. John A Grindel, CM, August 20, 1991, Office of Mission and Values, Box 1, Folder 7, DePaul University Archives.

¹⁶ Memorandum to the Members of the Association of Vincentians working at DePaul and attached Draft of the Implementation Model, January 16, 1996 by Rev. Edward Udovic, CM, Office of Mission and Values, Box 1, Folder 9, DePaul University Archives.

¹⁷ “Some Observations on the DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, Perryville,” fax from Rev. Stafford Poole, CM, to Rev. Thomas Croak, CM, February 3, 2000, St. Mary’s of the Barrens Seminary Records, Box 61A, Folder 9, DeAndreis-Rosati Memorial Archives, DePaul Special Collections and Archives, Chicago, Illinois.

¹⁸ Michelle McCoy, “The Manuscript as Question: Teaching Primary Sources in the Archives—the China Missions Project,” *College & Research Libraries* 71.1 (January 2010): 49-62.

¹⁹ Email correspondence from Rev. Edward Udovic, CM to Morgen MacIntosh Hodgetts, March 27, 2012.