

On behalf of the 2020 Conference Planning Committee, I would like to offer a warm welcome to our first ever virtual conference! When we selected the theme, *Embracing Challenges with Grace*, we had no idea just how prescient it would prove. It has certainly been a difficult time, as we have struggled to come to terms with the realities of living in a time of pandemic. COVID-19 has up-ended our lives, both personally and professionally, and challenged us to accept new ways of thinking, working, and supporting each other. The value of such a drastic change is that we are provided the occasion to reassess, to reconsider priorities, and to refocus. We are required to ask ourselves vital questions: Have we been providing the services needed to best support our administrations, researchers, and staff? How prepared are we when disaster strikes? And on a broader scale, are we as a society meeting the needs of our most vulnerable? These appraisals open a window for contemplating where we need to step up and conversely, where we should scale back. In our small way, our committee hopes that this conference will provide space for reflection on the opportunities we have as archivists to respond to the challenges of our profession.

Our keynote presentation by Dr. Matthew Heintzelman from the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library (HMML) will explore how the professional skills of archivists and librarians can be used on a global scale to safeguard cultural heritage. Since 1965 HMML has been digitizing religious manuscripts from around the world that have been threatened by war, disaster, looting, and neglect, ensuring that these manuscripts are preserved and accessible for future generations. They have digitized more than 50 million hand-written pages dating back to the Middle Ages. By partnering with local communities and utilizing current technologies, they are able to bring people together and document the cultures and beliefs of societies, through the preservation of handwritten texts.

Carolyn Samko from the City of Hamilton Heritage Facilities and Capital Planning Department will provide an overview of the historic Auchmar Estate, a building that has been adapted to meet the needs of its owners and the surrounding community in many ways throughout its 165-year history. It has functioned as a family home, a convalescence facility for members of the Royal Canadian Air Force, a spiritual retreat centre led by the Sisters of Social Service, and now a city-run historic home poised for adaptive reuse.

Mary Kosta, Archivist for the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph in Canada will delve into the challenges of preserving digital records, providing practical tips and the opportunity for hands-on application of digital preservation workflows.

Lea de la Paz, Archivist for the Archdiocese of Edmonton and Kimberly Walsh from the Archdiocese of Ottawa-Cornwall will broach the complicated topic of clergy records, discussing our rights and responsibilities as those tasked with maintaining and reviewing confidential and sensitive materials. They will ask us to consider not just how we care for the documents but also how we care for ourselves.

Our Annual General Meeting is included in this opportunity for reflection. It will allow us to connect with each other virtually and discuss the ways we support each other as members of the association.

These sessions alone, provide a rich collection to weigh how we can apply our professional knowledge to the demands of 21st century archives. Supplementing this robust program are the voices of many of our CAG members, through the contribution of "Idea Fair" articles and PowerPoint slides. We encourage you to spend time with these materials, which review important topics such as the Boston College Catholic

Religious Archives Repository, disaster planning, developing directories for our histories and institutions, accessing funding opportunities, and the value of collaboration.

Pivoting to a virtual platform during a pandemic has come with its own challenges. Community, family, and health have remained our priorities throughout the planning. We did not want to rush in our decision to offer a virtual conference, with the belief that the health and mental wellbeing of all those involved in contributing to the conference is paramount. We have endeavored to be mindful in providing space, in recognizing that priorities and availability may not be the same as they were pre-COVID. We have tried to put together a conference program that is flexible, as well as respectful of the current demands on our lives. There will be a learning curve for all as we embrace a new model of interaction. It is a great opening to try out Zoom as a platform for our conference. Hopefully, it will allow those who would not typically be able to travel, the ability to attend conference sessions. There is the aspiration that these virtual interactions will be more accessible. We have also decided to waive all conference fees for CAG members, opting to rely on donations to cover any associated costs. At a time when many individuals and institutions are faced with financial concerns, we have strived to make the conference barrier free as possible. While we will miss the in-person fellowship, we are excited to connect with all of you and to provide the excellent professional development that our annual conferences always afford.

We have been greatly appreciative for the ongoing help of the CAG Executive and for the encouragement and prayers that have been sent our way by CAG members. The Diocese of Hamilton, through our Bishop, His Excellency Douglas Crosby, our Chancellor of Spiritual Affairs Msgr. Murrary Kroetsch, our Chancellor of Temporal Affairs Mr. Jim Long, and the rest of our “Chancery family”, have been a source of reassurance and support. As have been our many sponsors, who committed to assisting our conference even when we were faced with cancelling and reimagining our way forward.

Our ability to reassess, reconsider, and refocus in order to provide this first ever CAG virtual conference is a testament to the thoughtfulness of the members of the Catholic Archivist Group and the extended communities that we bring with us to our roles on the planning committee. We are extremely thankful that we have been able to work together in a spirit of hospitality. Our committee has remained a dedicated team throughout this endeavor, always kind, compassionate, and positive with each other. It has been a pleasure for all of us. We are grateful for the opportunity to bring you the 2020 conference. We hope that you find we have met the challenge with grace!

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