

CONTINUED...

Historians

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tographs of them that could not be found at St. Michael's.

"It's been a tremendous help," Maddock said.

Although parishes are not required to maintain an archive, the diocese is bound by canon law to do so. According to Canon 487 in the revised Code of Canon Law, the public is welcome to review and request copies of documents of public record in the diocesan archives.

Sister Derby said the archives are "open to anyone for any research purposes" by making an appointment with her.

Putting it on paper

The next phase of this process — writing the history — can be as extensive a project as developing an archive. Ross and Haehn, for example, spent three years compiling their 150-page book on St. Joseph's in Penfield.

"We went to town," Haehn said with a laugh. "We said, 'We can't stop at two little pages on a pamphlet.' We went on to bigger and better things."

Welch envisions the same scenario as she works on her Ithaca parish's history over the next year.

"We'll probably have a book about two feet thick," she joked.

Much of this time is spent not only on collecting materials, but also conducting interviews with longtime parishioners.

However, Maddock warned, oral histories should not be taken at face value.

"You have to be careful, because people's memories and minds can change," Maddock noted.

"People may remember, but their memories get a little clouded," Ross agreed.

Ross and Urbanic stressed that verification should be sought for every anecdote.

"I spent a lot of time in the public library," Urbanic remarked.

Even some of the written historical data is not foolproof, Welch has discovered. After double-checking information in previous parish histories, she detected several mistakes.

"Nothing was factually documented. All the dates were out of whack," Welch said. She explained that some of the errors may have occurred when secretaries typed former priests' handwritten letters.

You are there

Along with accuracy, parish historians must pay attention to other forms of detail, Father McNamara said.

His first parish history, published in 1948, featured St. Mary's Church in Corning. It was during this project, he said, that he "learned to treat the history of a parish as part of the movement of the church throughout the world, and as part of a local community."

Similarly, Ross said the profile of St. Joseph's in Penfield also tracked the histories of Rochester and Monroe County.

"There was even some national scope," she said. For instance, the history quoted a journal excerpt from Father Ferdinand Scheid that noted, "President McKinley was shot twice on Sept. 6, 1901, at the PanAmerican in Buffalo at the Temple of Music."

Haehn added that such quotes helped readers identify with the era.

"If you can, bring it to life," she stressed. Haehn said she found entries of "what priests spent on certain items, like a hammer, and they would mark next to it, 'Wow, that was expensive.' It might have cost a couple of cents."

Maddock and Haehn said that historians should not automatically dismiss controversial moments in parish history.

"I would be the last one to write a derogative parish history, but we still have to be truthful," Maddock commented.

"You present it in a fair fashion, but also in a way that's compassionate," Haehn said.

Urbanic noted that historians need to maintain objectivity at all times, even though they might have strong feelings about the events they document.

"It's not your story. It's the people's story, the parish's story," Urbanic said.

Don't forget the future

A parish's history and archive must be updated constantly in order to be comprehensive. However, Schmidt from St. Margaret Mary said this seemingly simple point is often overlooked.

"It's got to be ongoing. If you can't

keep it going, then you've got to think of somebody who can take it over," he said.

Preservation of original documents is another priority. Welch said that she is making photocopies of old articles on special archival paper; whereas Wittman had made color copies of documents containing color photos.

Haehn stressed using modern technology to ensure that the data does not get lost. "The key word is computerize, computerize, computerize," she said.

Meanwhile, Welch said her co-collaborators have exchanged information through e-mail and computer discs.

"We don't have to re-type anything if we put it on the computer," Welch said.

Welch's ultimate goal, she said, is to present a history of Immaculate Conception Church that is both informative and entertaining for many generations to come.

"People ought to be able to find it in the public library and say, 'Wow, these Catholic people did some interesting things,'" Welch said.

EDITORS' NOTE: The Ecumenical and Interfaith Archives of Rochester, a ministry of the Greater Rochester Community of Churches, will sponsor introductory and intermediate archival workshops in cooperation with the Diocese of Rochester on Wednesday, Nov. 19. The workshops will be held at the Pastoral Center, 1150 Buffalo Road, Gates. Times are 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m. and 1:30-4 p.m., respectively. To register, or for other details, call the St. Bernard's Institute Office of Continuing Education at 716/271-3657.

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Applicants should possess a graduate degree in Theology or Pastoral Ministry or equivalent coursework combined with experience, with a Master of Divinity degree and one unit of CPE or CPT preferred. The ideal candidate will have a solid base of experience in a wide variety of parish/pastoral ministries and at least three years of demonstrated successful pastoral leadership in a parish organization, including responsibility for managing financial and human resource functions.

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