

Archives house memories

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

Life is worth living, partly because of the archives of the Diocese of Rochester. Proof is available by tuning in weekly to the Eternal Word Television Network, which has been broadcasting for two years the vintage shows hosted by the late Archbishop Fulton J. Sheen, bishop of the Rochester diocese from 1966-69.

The Fulton J. Sheen Company Inc., based in Rochester, owns the rights to "Life Is Worth Living," Archbishop Sheen's famous TV series of the 1950s and '60s. However, original prints of the shows — which Archbishop Sheen bequeathed to the former St. Bernard's Seminary — are stored



in the diocesan archives, located in the basement of the Pastoral Center in Gates. The Sheen Company, headed by William McDonnell, a parishioner at St. Louis Church, Pittsford, makes copies of the films, upgrading them for modern-day broadcast demands.

The originals of "Life Is Worth Living" are among the many historical treasures to be found in the diocesan archives, maintenance of which is funded by the Thanks Giving Appeal, the largest source of revenue in the diocese's annual operating budget.

Mercy Sister Connie Derby di-

rects archives and records for the diocese. She noted that the diocese's association with Archbishop Sheen has made the archives a magnet for biographers and researchers.

"I think we have the best collection of his thought and his theology," she said. The diocese has archived hundreds of Sheen photos and articles as well, not to mention his private library. The archives house several other interesting items including:

- The miter (ceremonial hat) of Bishop Bernard McQuaid, Rochester's first bishop, as a well as a faldstool, or chair, on which he sat when conferring minor orders upon seminarians.

- Vestments worn by priests in earlier eras, including elaborately embroidered black robes that were worn for funeral services.

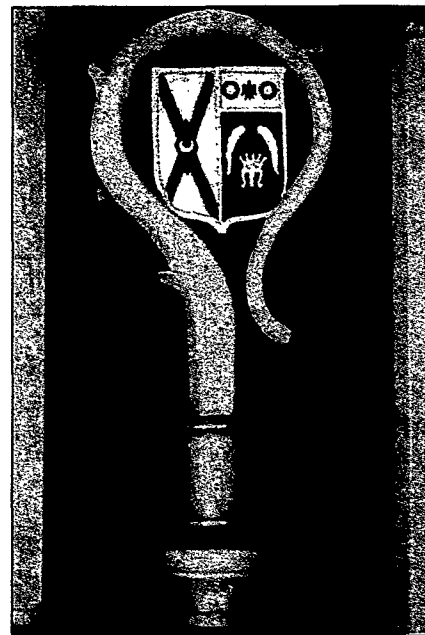
- Numerous letters and statements penned by the diocese's bishops.

- Files on every diocesan priest. Historical information on nuns, brothers and order priests who have served in the diocese are primarily maintained by their orders, Sister Derby said.

Each diocesan parish has its own files in the archives, Sister Derby said. However, she noted that the diocese does not keep baptismal and marriage records on parishioners, a task reserved to the parishes themselves. She is sometimes able to direct people researching their family trees to certain parishes if they know the nations from which their ancestors emigrated, she said, pointing out that early parishes were organized along ethnic lines.

Archives can be difficult to keep at parishes where space is at a premium, she said. The diocese does encourage parishes to maintain their own archives, she said, adding that the diocese has swapped items particular to a certain parish in exchange for an item the parish has that the diocese wants for its own archives.

Sister Derby is assisted in her work by four volunteers, including E. Robert Vogt, retired director of Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Rochester, and Pat Mulich, a former schoolteacher and administrator and a parishioner at Assumption of Our Lady Church in Fairport. She also receives assistance from Father John J. Phillips, priest-in-residence at St. John of Rochester Parish in Fairport, and James F. Johnston, who attends Holy Redeemer/St. Francis Xavier



Karin von Voigtlander/Catholic Courier

Bishop Joseph L. Hogan's crozier is among the artifacts that can be found in the Diocese of Rochester's archives.

Parish in Rochester.

"Basically, the place wouldn't run if they weren't here," Sister Derby said of her volunteers. "They field a lot of requests."

The archives were established in May 1989, fulfilling the decades-old dream of Father Robert F. McNamara, diocesan archivist and author of the official diocesan history.

Father McNamara noted that the U.S. bicentennial in 1976 inspired the nation's bishops to call for all dioceses to establish archives. Like many dioceses, however, Rochester had not saved the important papers of all of its bishops, he said. However, dioceses have become more conscious in recent years of the importance of keeping historical records.

"You need a sense of the value of this," he said of archiving. "It's so important for research, particularly, and so embarrassing for a diocese to have nothing on hand."

In fact, the diocese almost lost the hand-written diaries of Bishop McQuaid in the late 1930s when they were thrown out during a chancery move. A priest happened to notice them in a garbage can, and rescued them. In a *Catholic Courier* article about the 1989 opening of the archives, Father McNamara was quoted as saying such incidents make "you want to tear out what's left of your hair."

People of the present are not the only ones who will benefit from the efforts of Sister Derby and her archives volunteers. Future Catholics also will reap the rewards of listening to the learned voices of yesteryear when making plans

"If we don't know where we've been, it's harder to know where we should go," Sister Derby said.

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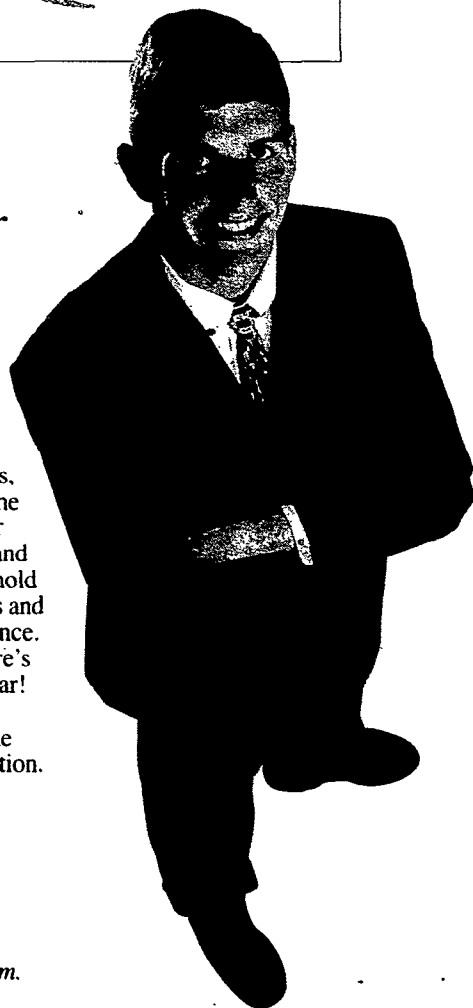
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