SUPPORTING THE SPIRIT OF INQUIRY

By Jennifer Younger, Executive Director (Retired), CRRA

CRRA Corner first appeared in June 2016 when Rose Fortier, Marquette University, and Pat Lawton, Digital Projects Librarian, formally introduced CRRA and its mission of enhancing access to Catholic resources to readers of Catholic Library World. Since then, we have been inspired by many readers who told us how their use of CRRA resources—the Catholic Portal, CRRA Subject Guides, and the Catholic News Archive—supported their research.

Users say it best in telling the value of these resources.

A journalist wrote “compelling reading...on the revolutionary changes that took place in the Church in the 1960s: all the Catholic News Archive needs is more content.”

Professors mention that their students love “clicking through to source materials” and exploring how Catholicism engages with the broader world in which it exists.

A library director reported that students liked the user-friendly interface as well as the browsability of entire newspaper issues with professors giving high marks to the quality of student research. Their enthusiasm is contagious, and I’m delighted to share it here.

We regularly hear from archivists and librarians who tell us how they do a better job of helping their users.

One librarian was delighted to find the full text of the Philadelphia Catholics response in 1844 to Anti-Nativists in the Catholic Telegraph because it wasn’t in the Philadelphia newspaper.

An archivist said she can answer three times as many questions using the digitized newspapers, while another archivist zeroed in on finding the history of a local parish via the Portal.

Sharon Kabel, an independent researcher who recently completed The Periti of Vatican II wrote, “the Catholic News Archive was crucial in confirming the ‘real’ first names of the periti, and the Portal was the perfect complement to find archival collections of periti papers.”

Similarly, Karen Lesiak, a retired library director and CRRA digitizing partner, mentioned that the thousands of newspaper articles in the Catholic News Archive and documents in archival collections found via the Portal were invaluable in putting a multi-faceted perspective on the impact of the Second Vatican Council as a turning point in Church history (Lesiak, 2020).

Let me continue by telling you a few more stories.

From Manhattan College, Associate Professor Kevin Ahern wrote: “The Catholic News Archive is invaluable for me in my role as a theologian, professor, and leader in international lay movements.”

He continued: “I’m now using the archives to explore the collapse of the National Federation of Catholic College Students in the 1950s and 1960s. Access to the news articles has been very helpful, particularly since COVID has made travel to university archives at Notre Dame, CUA, and in Europe difficult.”

Audra Dugandzic, a graduate student in sociology at the University of Notre Dame, is exploring how the liturgical changes made after Vatican II might be implicated in religious and political polarization among American Catholics. Diocesan newspapers tell what was happening beyond the walls of the chancery and round out what is learned from diocesan liturgy commissions and other documents.

Perhaps my favorite story comes from two parishioners in the Archdiocese of Hartford, Connecticut, who were researching parish history for anniversary celebrations. Their open web searches led them to news articles in the Archive and their delight in finding information about their respective parish churches motivated them to donate money. Donations like this enable even more content to be discovered.

Unexpected discoveries can show up in searches.

Kevin Ahern’s experience says it all: “As a pleasant surprise, I also discovered a whole series (from the Catholic World in Pictures) of images of leaf etchings by a De La Salle brother at my own college from the 1940s. I later found out he was called Leafy Louie—his craft was impressive, and I put a series of twitter posts about it online last year. So, the archive also helps to reveal things that might be in the building next door!”

Usage statistics tell another part of the story. In the first half of 2021, users consulted more than 24,500 pages in the Portal on topics ranging from Catholic education and local church history to Catholic pamphlets and labor relations. During the same period, users consulted 2,557 pages in the Subject Guides, of which Religious Orders for Women was the most frequently consulted. They also viewed over half a million pages in the Catholic News Archive. While most usage comes from the United States, about ten to fifteen percent of users were located in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Canada, Italy, India, Australia, and the Philippines.
Many users find these resources through open web searches yet direct referrals from libraries and other websites show that they play an important role in apprising users of these resources. The American Catholic Historical Association (ACHA) invites its members to explore the rare and unique materials held in the Portal through its #HiddenCatholicCollections project at achahistory.org/hidden. Similarly, the Catholic Worker Movement provides a link to its newspaper, which is in the Catholic News Archive, at catholicworker.org/about-the-catholic-worker-movement/catholic-worker-archives.

Dozens of libraries and archives provide links from their sites as well.

The Most Reverend Gregory Aymond, Archbishop of New Orleans, said a few years ago, "The Catholic Church needs to have its history easily accessible to researchers and interested readers."

Together with our members and digitizing partners, we are enhancing access to rare, unique, and valuable Catholic resources. Why not add links to your websites and invite your users into the joys of discovery via the Portal, the CRRA Subject Guides, and the Catholic News Archive?

**Catholic News Archive.** Accessible at thecatholicnewsarchive.org.

**Catholic Portal.** Accessible at vufind. catholicresearch.org/vufind.

**CRRA Subject Guides.** Accessible at guides.catholicresearch.org.


**“Pere Marquette and the Indians”** by Wilhelmin Lamprecht. Raynor Library, Pere Marquette Collection, Marquette University.

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Elizabeth Ann Seton
Presented in the Mother Seton Guild Bulletin, Number 11, May 1944
Daughters of Charity Provincial Archives, Emmitsburg, MD