

## **Central Congregational Archive of the Poor Servants of the Mother of God**

### **Circular from the Archivist**

The aim of this note is to give some idea of the function of the SMG Generalate archives, to suggest how the archivist may be able to help you in administering historical archives and artefacts, and to suggest categories of items which you may consider suitable for donation to the archives.

- The core of the Generalate archive consists of papers, photographs and published material relating to early years of the congregation, including the papers of Mother Magdalen Taylor; files relating to the central administration of the congregation, including property; and papers such as deeds, annals and diaries relating to houses and institutions of the congregation. A summary of the contents is attached.

- The main aim of the archive is to preserve and build up documentation which will allow as full a picture as possible of the life and working of the institute to survive for future generations, and to give access to those wishing to use the material. Broadly speaking, the kind of material in which the archivist is interested in is as follows:

1. Records relating to the operational and administrative processes and procedures of the congregation, its houses, and apostolic works, including records relating to the day-to day functioning of establishments; the active employment of Sisters e.g. in schools, hospitals and missions; and more informal activities such as involvement with clubs, sodalities etc.

2. Records relating to the spiritual and devotional life of the congregation, including old liturgical books and offices; documents relating to retreats and devotions; and material relating to particular events, e.g. orders of service for jubilees etc.

3. Papers and artefacts originating with individual Sisters, and others connected with the congregation. The story of the life of the institute is contained not merely in official records and annals, but in the ordinary and extraordinary events which make up the lives of its members. This might include material related to leisure or other activities, e.g. art works, or items related to individual educational development such as theses, study notes. It is understood that personal records such as letters and diaries may be considered to contain private or sensitive information, and the archivist is happy to discuss the imposition of restrictions on the use of such material prior to any decision being made as to the donation of such records to the archives.

- If you are considering donating material to the archives, the following issues should be considered:

1. The first aim of the archives is to create and preserve as full an historical record of the institute as is possible. Such a record is not merely contained within dusty old deeds and manuscripts - the traditional view of archives! - it may be contained in audio or video tapes, databases, e-mails, or old photographs hanging on the wall! If in doubt, the archivist is available to provide advice. However, it should be borne in mind that modern forms of informational media

such as tapes and colour photographs are greatly prone to decay and environmental degradation. Records stored in poor or insecure conditions, particularly where they are exposed to extremes of temperature and humidity, are extremely vulnerable to loss, damage or decay. There is a particular concern at the moment to identify **videos** particularly any unique items relating to the life and functions of the congregation, as this is a format which is currently becoming obsolete, and material which may be of historical value needs to be identified so that it can be transferred to a more permanent medium.

2. The areas which it is particularly important to document for posterity include: major or significant events in the history of the institute, or the lives of persons connected with it, particularly where a record may exist which may add significantly to what is already known; major plans, projects or initiatives, e.g. building works, social or community projects, whether or not the plans finally came to fruition; and evidence of title to property and fixed assets, particularly where the property may subsequently have been disposed of. However, records of local events such as newsletters, fliers and other apparently 'ephemeral' items can be of great value if collected and maintained, as they help provide a continuous record of the formal and informal activities of local communities. Where individual Sisters are engaged in community or other projects, which may not be formally well documented, they may consider keeping a diary or other record of their activities, if this does not use up too much of their time.

3. As a rule the archive can only accept material when it is no longer of current value to the user, and is unlikely to be required for return or frequent reference by the donor. However, where material which may be of long-term historical value is being held, whether of an official or a personal nature, the archivist is happy to provide advice on means of storage and preservation, and on the likely value of the records, without any prejudice as to the future disposition of the material. Records may only be accepted into the archives with the agreement of the Generalate of the congregation, and any conditions relating to access, closure of material etc which the donor may wish to impose also need to be agreed with the Generalate.

4. Usually, material received into the archives is accepted as a *gift*, and those wishing to view archives will generally be asked to consult them at the archives at St Mary's Convent in Brentford, after having arranged in advance an appointment with the archivist. However, there will be provision for material to be taken back on loan where circumstances demand, with the permission of the Generalate. Certain categories of library items, where a number of copies exist, are suitable for long - term loan. Donors will be provided with a receipt and schedule for any material donated, and also with a full copy of the catalogue record when cataloguing is completed. If you are considering donating material, it is wise to contact the archivist first to arrange transfer, and any material which is being physically transferred to the archives *needs at the least to include a note of the donor's contact details* so that a receipt and schedule can be supplied.

- If any further information on the above is required, or generally on the administration of the archives, contact details are attached.