COVID-19 Web Archives

Evolving Catholic and Marian Devotional Practices

KAYLA HARRIS AND STEPHANIE SHREFFLER

*T*he COVID-19 pandemic had a tremendous impact on the work of academic librarians and archivists. Stay-at-home orders meant that librarians often had to set aside in-progress tasks and identify new remote projects. For archivists who primarily work with physical items, the pandemic also meant reassessing how to provide services to patrons, steward the collections, and continue to acquire new material that falls within the collecting scope. The Archivists at the University of Dayton used some of their time at home to start web archive collections that recorded how the pandemic affected Catholic life in the United States and the world.

The University of Dayton (UD) is a mid-sized, Catholic research university located in Dayton, Ohio. Founded by members of the Society of Mary, the University upholds the values and charism of the religious order. In particular, the Marianists' devotion to Mary still resonates on campus, even as the faculty, staff, and students become more

diverse in their backgrounds and beliefs. The University Libraries is composed of the University Archives and Special Collections, Roesch Library, which is the main campus library, and the Marian Library. Founded in 1943, the Marian Library holds the world's largest collection of materials on the Virgin Mary, including rare and circulating books, archival collections, artwork, and artifacts. There are seven full-time employees in the Marian Library, four faculty and three staff. The Director oversees all operations, the Collections Librarian manages the printed material, the Visual Resources Librarian manages the art and artifacts, and the Archivist manages the archival collections. With a similar religious focus, the U.S. Catholic Special Collection (USCSC) was established in the Roesch Library to document the history and culture of Catholicism in the United States and support the Religious Studies doctoral program at the University of Dayton. The materials include books, periodicals and journals, archival collections, artifacts, and ephemera. That Library is staffed by one Collections Librarian/Archivist and is open to researchers four days a week. In addition to providing instruction, research support, and materials to the campus community and beyond, both of these collections are a visible manifestation of the University's identity.

Pandemic Archiving

Archiving contemporary events is important for documenting history for future generations though it presents its own challenges, especially in technique and scope. The COVID-19 pandemic was not the first time that archivists rushed to collect content for a rapidly evolving historical event. This process of quickly collecting materials can include gathering both physical and digital material and is referred to by various names such as "spontaneous collecting" or "emergency collecting." The Archive-It blog specifically has a section in their blog dedicated to archiving spontaneous events, including efforts to document the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, the October 1, 2017 mass shooting in Las Vegas, Nevada, and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic.

With support from a Lyrasis Catalyst Fund Grant, Kara McClurken from the University of Virginia (UVA) conducted a survey in 2018 about the practices that cultural heritage institutions employ for this type of rapid collecting. In the introduction of the report that followed,

she noted that the interest in conducting the survey stemmed from UVA's experience archiving content related to protests and counter-protests in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017. Notably, at the time of this survey, 43 percent of survey respondents reported that their institution had been involved in an event that required rapid collecting (McClurken 2019). Prior to 2020, many institutions had their own isolated experiences with rapid collecting; however, COVID-19 was unique in the way that it affected all cultural heritage institutions to some degree. During COVID-19, some institutions developed initiatives to collect physical and digital artifacts such as photographs, personal journal entries, and more. For example, the Arizona State University School of Historical, Philosophical and Religious Studies developed an initiative with several academic institutions called Journal of the Plague Year, to "document, curate and preserve experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic for the historical record, to empower diverse communities to collect, share and interpret their own stories of the COVID-19 pandemic and to develop a model for rapid-response born-digital collecting practices, theories and ethical frameworks" (n.d.).

Web archiving already faces challenges in terms of identifying appropriate scope and resources, but archiving religious content may be even more susceptible given the challenges of preserving content related to particular religious interests and specific congregations. In the summer of 2018, Boston College sponsored and hosted the conference "Envisioning the Future of Catholic Religious Archives." Bringing together archivists, historians, and leaders of religious communities, the conference was an initial step at addressing challenges faced by religious orders coming to completion. "Coming to completion" refers to the end of a religious order because of a lack of new members. Prior to completion, these orders must grapple with how to preserve and provide access to their archival legacies. After the conference a working committee issued the working paper *Preserving the Past, Building for the Future* (McCarthy et al. 2019). Representatives from many religious orders at the conference had similar challenges with an aging population and limited resources to be able to fund a professional archivist, or even to be able to properly steward the existing records of the congregation.

In December 2020, Joe Puccio, from the Library of Congress, wrote a reflective blog post detailing some archiving challenges which included developing a sustainable workflow that reflects diverse viewpoints while acknowledging that not everything *proposed* to be

archived can feasibly *be* archived (Puccio 2020). Tori Maches from University of California San Diego described similar challenges in July 2021, including "digital FOMO" (fear of missing out) when trying to determine what online content to collect (Maches 2021). She also discussed the emotional toll of this type of work during a pandemic and the importance of self-care. Even well-resourced archives with robust web archiving programs faced many challenges when collecting content relevant to their institution and the COVID-19 pandemic because of the enormous scope.

The Pandemic at the University Libraries

On March 10, 2020, UD suspended in-person classes and moved to remote learning. Shortly after, it instituted remote work for the majority of its employees, including almost all employees of the University Libraries. Library staff continued to work at home until August 2020, when most employees came back to work in the office at least one day per week. The number of days worked in-office varied from person to person, depending on their particular job duties and the needs of each department.

From March to August 2020, Library staff were asked to identify remote projects. This task presented a unique challenge for Special Collections Librarians and Archivists, as their work often centered on working directly with physical objects such as books, audiovisual materials, and artifacts. Security concerns made it impractical for Librarians and Archivists to bring these items home. Instead, their work during these months included writing metadata, creating online tutorials and research guides (such as LibGuides), performing outreach to faculty and staff, and creating new projects. One particular project of note was the creation of web archive collections that documented the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Catholic life and Marian devotion. Created by the Archivists of the Marian Library and the U.S. Catholic Special Collection, the project was not only important for capturing material that might otherwise be lost, but it also allowed other Library employees to contribute their expertise to this project remotely.

Web Archiving at the University of Dayton

In 2015, the University Libraries purchased a subscription to Archive-It, a web-based software created by the digital library Internet Archive that allows partner institutions to create curated collections of web archives. These annual subscriptions provide partners with a set amount of storage space for their collections. The Archivists of the Marian Library and the USCSC saw this subscription as an opportunity to expand beyond traditional acquisitions and collecting. One of the driving factors for the University Archives and Special Collections Archivists to acquire this software was the ability to capture institutional content available only on the internet.

Partnering institutions identify certain URLs, called seeds, that they wish to archive. Library personnel add these seeds to the Archive-It software and run crawls on the URLs to save these pages. Crawls can be saved automatically, or archivists can run test crawls that allow them to review what was picked up in the crawl. Crawls can be one-time or recurring, and partners can customize the frequency of recurring crawls. Archivists can also specify the depth that they want the crawl to go to, meaning that the software can crawl a single page, an entire site, or even the site plus the pages that are linked from the original site. Librarians and archivists at partner institutions can then add metadata to individual seeds and collections. Archive-It collections are indexed by Google, making these collections discoverable and accessible to researchers across the world.

In 2018, the Archivists and Technical Services Librarians at UD completed a project to harvest and index metadata records for the seeds into the EBSCO Discovery Service, locally branded as UDiscover. The Coordinator of Cataloging created a data dictionary that mapped Archive-It metadata fields to the metadata fields in UDiscover. UDiscover indexes the Archive-It collections every two weeks, ensuring the web archive collections remain up-to-date and accessible in the discovery layer. This indexing process was developed to provide another access point for users to find and utilize the web archive collections beyond UD's institutional page in Archive-It.

Prior to the pandemic the Marian Library and the USCSC maintained a few different types of web archive collections. For the Marian Library, two of these collections were single-seed collections of an organizational website for which the Marian Library served as a designated repository. The websites for the Mariological Society

of America and the Friends of the Creche were crawled once annually to capture any new web content as part of an agreement with these organizations to archive physical and digital material. Another collection, Mary's Gardens, was created for a one-time capture of a website transferred as part of a deed of gift before being taken offline after the creator's passing. Although the Marian Library had several collections, they were not time-consuming after the initial set-up, and they did not require a large investment of staff time to maintain these scheduled crawls.

The USCSC had only one web archive collection prior to the pandemic, but it contained numerous seeds with a more active crawl frequency schedule. The American Catholic Blogs Collection archives blogs written by American Catholics and seeks to record multiple viewpoints and perspectives on Catholicism. Though not comprehensive of every blog written by an American Catholic on the internet, the collection does require more maintenance than the Marian Library collections to ensure links remain active. It also takes more time to find websites and create the unique metadata for each seed. Archivists in both areas had ideas for other websites to begin collecting, but, tasked with managing all aspects of the archival collections, beginning new web archives was not a top priority.

Lourdes on Lockdown

In early March 2020 when the novel coronavirus had not yet been declared a pandemic, we learned about the impact of the virus through news stories around the globe. An upper-level English seminar class was visiting the Marian Library to look at some of the artifacts from the Lourdes shrine in France and discuss different approaches to healing. However, instead of focusing solely on the planned lesson, students were curious about European news and were thinking about how the virus would impact Lourdes where the act of healing is intertwined with being in community with others. Later that evening, a news article described how the shrine would close to the public for the first time in history and that the healing baths had already closed in February (Mares 2020; Catholic News Service 2020).

The homepage for the Lourdes shrine is a good example that illustrates why web archiving is so crucial. Organization websites are

intended to convey updated information to their visitors. One day, the website communicated "Lourdes is open" and, the next day, the content was updated to reflect the shrine's closure. Generally, these updates are not archived by the institution themselves, and, if a website has not been archived, it would be difficult to trace these changes. Especially during the pandemic, information changed at a rapid pace and websites were continually updated to reflect new guidelines, closures, and impacts. For future researchers to understand how the pandemic timeline evolved, archived websites, especially multiple crawls of a single site over time, can be helpful in understanding these types of changes.

A Virtual Clipping File

Prior to the pandemic, in addition to the web archive collections consisting of a single seed for designated repository agreements, the Marian Library had also started a collection of "clippings" of miscellaneous sites on the internet related to Mary. This Marian Library Web Clippings collection was inspired by a physical collection of clippings in the Marian Library referred to as the Sutton File. Mildred Sutton, a longtime volunteer for the Marian Library, clipped articles from secular and religious presses related to the Virgin Mary. She created an extensive cross-referencing system of keywords, and the clipping file expanded beyond newspapers to include other ephemera, numbering over 60,000 items. Even with Ms. Sutton's diligent work, the collection still only represents a fraction of the news stories related to the Virgin Mary. The creation of the web clipping collection was an attempt to adapt Mildred Suttons's project to the digital age.

Archiving Marian Devotion

The Marian Library Archivist began to notice many instances of Marian devotion in the news online and saw the value of archiving this content using Archive-It. At the beginning of this effort, sites were crawled as they were found or sometimes were directly sent to the Archivist from colleagues once they learned about the project.

Image 1: Homemade COVID-19 masks featuring Our Lady of Guadalupe and her immaculate heart made by Danielle Lehr. Photograph by Danielle Lehr.

Image 2: Dungaw in thwe Philippines. Photograph by Mia B. Eballo.

Personalizing the Pandemic

Similar to other pandemic archiving projects, an appeal was issued via the Marian Library blog for examples of personal stories about Marian devotion during the pandemic (Harris 2020). While the collecting of physical and digital materials from individuals was not nearly as successful as web archiving, it yielded several submissions, including photographs of handmade masks featuring Our Lady of Guadalupe (see Figure 1). Another user shared an example of Marian piety in the Philippines, photographs of the practice of "dungaw," which means "to look out" or "looking out the window" (see Figure 2). Mia B. Eballo wrote in her submission to the Marian Library,

> "Dungaw" in Filipino means "looking out the window." This practice was done not only because people cannot go out of the house to engage in religious activities but this also is an invocation of the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Saints whose images are put near the window in a manner that they are looking out as an act of request/appeal for God to help us. (M.B. Eballo, personal communication, June 6, 2020)

This specific practice during COVID-19 was covered in the *Journal of Religion and Health*. The authors found this practice fostered hope for those who participated, helped them feel a sense of community while isolated, and even brought joy during such a difficult time (Del Castillo et al. 2021).

As the weeks progressed and everyone began to realize that the pandemic was not a short interruption to daily life, examples of Marian devotion on the internet grew in number. It became clear that a workflow was needed to keep the project manageable. The Library Archivist created a Marian Library Web Clippings Tracking spreadsheet in Google Sheets. New seeds, or URLs, were added to the spreadsheet when they were discovered or sent to the Archivist. A Google alert was also created using several search terms such as "(Virgin Mary AND COVID-19 OR coronavirus)" to find relevant stories that were delivered in a digest email daily. Then, the Archivist used the spreadsheet to add multiple URLs to Archive-It to crawl in a batch once or twice weekly. This workflow of batch crawling only once or twice weekly was especially helpful when working a split schedule. Additionally, it was easier to track when a seed was collected and described.

The Marian Library collecting scope is international, and it was interesting—professionally and personally—to see what was

published about Marian devotion within various communities. In March 2020, Pope Francis made a public address invoking the title "Mary, Health of the Sick" and asked the Virgin Mary to watch over the world during the crisis. The Italian Air Force brought a statue of Our Lady of Loreto aboard an aircraft they flew over Italy in order to bless and provide protection for the entire country (Roman 2020). Later, Chilean priests also had a statue of the Virgin Mary flown over the country in a helicopter after a laywoman witnessed the ceremony in Italy and helped organize the ritual in Chile (Gayangos 2020).

Personal stories of devotion were discovered and recorded, such as a local Ohio news story highlighting an interview with one family who clutched an icon of the Virgin Mary while discussing the impact of the pandemic. There was another story of a teenager in Wisconsin who sought to lift spirits while social distancing through her sidewalk art of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Despite capturing these stories, many instances of Marian devotion by communities and individuals were not written about on the internet and, therefore, were not captured in this project. The Archivist took solace in the effort to collect as much as possible, and that doing something was better than not collecting any of these stories.

COVID-19 and the U.S. Church

Inspired by the pandemic collection started by the Marian Library Archivist, the USCSC Collections Librarian/Archivist identified a need to archive websites that documented the effect of the pandemic on the Catholic Church in the United States. The pandemic caused major upheaval in church practices. Perhaps most significantly, Catholics had to attend virtual Mass because of church closures and social distancing rules.

The Collections Librarian/Archivist named the USCSC pandemic collection "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the U.S. Church." Her initial goal was to collect COVID-19 updates that appeared on diocesan websites. The updates gave a moment-by-moment picture of the pandemic in real time, including announcements of church closures in March 2020, followed by information about churches reopening and accompanying social distancing guidelines. These diocesan website seeds comprise the majority of this collection. The collection also archives personal reflections written by American Catholics on their blogs,

Personalizing the Pandemic

Catholic news articles on the pandemic's impact on devotional practices, and informational pieces on COVID-19 vaccines.

To find websites to archive, the Collections Librarian/Archivist employed a couple of strategies. The first strategy was locating diocesan and archdiocesan websites and news updates. This process was fairly straightforward. The Archivist visited these sites and checked to see if they had pandemic-related content. She was also familiar with Catholic blogs due to the USCSC blog collection, and could easily check those blogs and others to see if their owners had commented on the pandemic. The second strategy was to locate news coverage, although finding current news articles over the course of the pandemic presented a special challenge. Unlike the diocesan websites or blogs, which featured COVID-19 updates less frequently, the number of news articles on the pandemic grew daily. To help identify articles of interest that specifically commented on the pandemic's effects on the Church and U.S. Catholics, the Archivist used Google alerts to send results for the search string "(coronavirus OR covid-19 OR sars-cov2) AND catholic" via email daily. Results came from news sources, websites, and blogs, thus searching broadly for COVID-19-related web sources. These alerts proved highly effective at helping the Archivist continually identify new seeds to potentially add to the web archives with minimum time and effort required. After identifying seeds, the Archivist decided on the parameters of the crawls to save these sites. Although she used recurring crawls for the other USCSC web collections, the Archivist chose to use one-time crawls for the COVID-19 collection in order to reduce the amount of storage space required.

Developing Sustainable Workflows

Running a test crawl and a scheduled crawl took about 48 hours. After that period, the archived webpage could be viewed in the pandemic collection, but it lacked any metadata to make it findable and accessible. A couple of years prior to the pandemic, the Special Collections Librarians and Archivists at UD created a data dictionary for the web archives collections. They worked with a cataloging librarian and consulted the recommendations contained in "Descriptive Metadata for Web Archiving," published by the OCLC Research Library Partnership Web Archiving Metadata Working Group in 2018. They then created a schema with mandatory and optional metadata fields.

The mandatory fields were title, URL, description, subject, creator, source, language, type, date, rights, and collector. The URL field was automatically filled in by the Archive-It software, but the rest of the fields required manual input. Archive-It includes a bulk metadata editing feature, so some fields that use the same language for every seed could be filled in for many seeds at once. The bulk editing saved a great deal of time and allowed for greater focus on more unique fields, such as description and subject.

UD Archivists felt comfortable filling in most metadata fields by themselves with the guidance of their original schema created in 2018. However, they wanted to include Library of Congress subject headings for each subject field. Knowing they had less expertise with these headings, they worked with a cataloger to create the subject headings. They granted her access to the backend of the software so she could directly add subject headings to each field.

Given the increasingly large number of one-time seeds crawled in the collection, columns were added to the Marian Library Web Clippings Tracking spreadsheet for metadata and subject headings. It became too onerous to complete the metadata for each seed when it was crawled. Instead, the focus became finding and crawling the seeds before they were lost, with the idea that metadata to facilitate access could always be added later. In the Marian Library, the work of adding the basic metadata became a shared responsibility with staff and student employees who needed remote work. Already having developed the schema meant that even with multiple people working on the project, the metadata stayed relatively consistent.

As mentioned, the Special Collections Cataloger had direct access to Archive-It and could add the subject headings. Marian Library staff experimented with the best use of time. Sometimes the Cataloger would add the subject headings to the tracking spreadsheet first for multiple seeds and add them into Archive-It later. The Cataloger explained that this process helped them see similarities across different sites when selecting subject headings. The Archive-It metadata interface does have a quirk where once a term is entered, it cannot be edited, but must be deleted and replaced. In order for the subject headings to match the subject headings in the discovery layer, spaces and dashes had to be the same. For example, the heading "COVID-19 Pandemic 2020 -- Religious aspects" had to be manually entered exactly and if the spaces were removed from the dashes, it would not be seen as the same subject heading in the discovery layer.

Impact of the Web Archive Collections

Creating the pandemic web archive collections was a significant project for many reasons. The project could be worked on remotely and it proved easy to manage in small amounts of time. Both Archivists had to split their days between work and caring for their small children, and so they faced frequent interruptions. This project featured several small discrete steps that could be worked on individually or all at once, depending on the time available: identifying seeds, running a test crawl, examining the test crawl's results, running a final crawl, and writing and proofreading metadata. Additionally, none of these steps required the type of deep thought necessary for other work such as writing or creating course content. The project was a good fit for those times when various stresses of the pandemic meant the Archivists had reduced concentration and focus.

This project also afforded an opportunity for the Special Collections units to work more closely with the Special Collections Cataloger. Her deep knowledge of cataloging standards made the metadata stronger and made the collections more discoverable by researchers. She shared how much she enjoyed cataloging a different type of content.

Although many archivists created pandemic web archives, the Marian Library and USCSC collections were unique in that they explored the pandemic through the lens of Catholic practices and devotion. Much of the focus of COVID-19 web archiving projects examined public health issues, but religion is often a source of comfort and hope for those who believe in a higher power. Catholicism especially is very community-focused, and social distancing regulations and access to rituals had a lasting impact on U.S. Catholics. Since the Archivists are Catholic, the project felt very personal as they were struggling with their own emotions and personal lives while trying to complete the daunting task of archiving the pandemic impacts on their own religious tradition. Archiving these web pages gave the Archivists a sense of purpose. They could see directly how their work would help preserve records of the pandemic for use by researchers, both in the present and in the future.

At the beginning of this project, it was not clear when the pandemic would officially end, especially as the virus itself and its impacts will be around for a long time to come. Yet, the Archivists chose to end their active pandemic collecting efforts with their

return to in-person work and regular duties at UD in July 2021. In August 2021, UD resumed regular in-person classes. The Archivists use the pandemic web archives in instruction for undergraduate students as examples of modern archival practices. Students often think that archives only collect papers and manuscripts that are decades or hundreds of years old. Having lived through the pandemic themselves, many students over the next several years may feel a particular interest in the contents of this collection. The collection can help them understand the importance of continuing to preserve modern history. The web archive collections were used in the exhibit text for *Rituals of Healing: Body, Mind, Spirit*, which ran from February 8 to April 20, 2023. It explored "the beliefs and practices surrounding religion, medicine, and healing of the body, mind and spirit" (Schweickart 2023). Specifically, visitors to the exhibit saw how the title "Mary, Health of the Sick," has been used for centuries and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the emotional toll of trying to document and preserve as much information on the impact of the pandemic on U.S. Catholics as possible, the authors felt that anything saved is better than nothing. While archivists around the world saved snapshots of the impact of COVID-19, UD Archivists feel that it is inspiring to be one small piece of such an enormous effort.

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