

ARCHIVES AND CHURCH LEGACY: SAFEGUARDING YOUR CHURCH'S MISSION AND MEMORIES

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KYLE ROBERTS: Good afternoon. Thank you for joining us today. My name is Kyle Roberts, and I am the Executive Director of the Congregational Library & Archives. Welcome to today's Church Stewardship Initiative program, "Archives and the Legacy Process."

To begin, I want to acknowledge that the Congregational Library & Archives resides in what is now known as Boston, which is in the Place of the Blue Hills, the homeland of the Massachusetts people, whose relationships and connections with the land continue to this day and into the future.

For those joining us for the first time, the Congregational Library & Archives is an independent research library. Established in 1853, the CLA's mission is to foster a deeper understanding of the spiritual, intellectual, cultural, and civic dimensions of the Congregational story and its ongoing relevance in the 21st century.

We do this through free access to our research library of 225,000 books, pamphlets, periodicals, and manuscripts, and our digital archive, which has more than 130,000 images, many drawn from our New England's Hidden Histories project.

Throughout the year, we offer educational programs and research fellowships for students, scholars, researchers, and churches, and really anyone interested in Congregationalism's influence on the American story. Please check our website, congregationallibrary.org, to learn more about what we do and for news of forthcoming events.

At the Congregational Library, we are committed to supporting churches struggling to engage in effective records management. From reference requests to in-person feedback, the archivists at the Congregational Library have long recognized the desire among churches to better understand how to steward their church records, and how to maintain the memories and mission of their church community. They also recognize the challenge of not always knowing where to begin.

Thus far, we have sponsored eight programs in our Church Stewardship Initiative, all of which can be found on the CSI, or the Church Stewardship Initiative webpage on our website.

And now, without further ado, please let me introduce our speakers.

Zachary Bodnar graduated with a Master's of Library and Information Science from Simmons University, with a concentration in Archives Management in 2018. Prior to his work at the CLA, Zack worked at the Bellamy Faraday House and Garden Archive, the Vassar College Special Collections, the Harvard Law School Library, and the Harvard Botany Libraries. Zachary joined the CLA as an archives assistant in 2017, helping to prepare materials for digitization through New England's Hidden Histories. In 2018, he took on the title of archivist. His professional interests include metadata collection and management, digital archiving, audio and visual preservation, and archives management.

Billy McCarthy graduated with a Master's of Library and Information Science at Simmons University, with a concentration in archival management. He started working at the CLA through a graduate internship, and was hired full time as an archivist in 2018. Billy is the Head of Reader Services, helping the CLA's visitors with reference requests and facilitating in-person research. Billy also serves as the collection manager for the archives, working with the CLA's offsite vendor to protect and maintain the organization's archival records. Some of his professional interests include increasing access, collection management, processing of complex materials, and facilitating research.

Great. Take it away, Zack.

ZACHARY BODNAR: Thank you so much, Kyle, and good day to everyone who has tuned into today's program, "Archives and the Legacy Process: A Church Stewardship Initiative Workshop." We're so excited to have you all here today.

In the past, we've had a few programs focused on using your archive, such as webinars on writing histories using the archive, and programs focused on the accessibility and usability of archival materials. Well, today is another program in a somewhat similar vein as we want to look at how the archive plays a role in the legacy process.

Today's program is part of the CLA's Church Stewardship Initiative. This initiative includes webinars and workshops, all focused on helping churches develop their own stewardship programs. We believe that church communities are uniquely positioned to best preserve the memories of their communities and keep the mission of the church accessible for future generations.

The Church Stewardship Program is now in its third series of webinars, and we still haven't come close to running out of topics to discuss.

For those who are interested, every one of our past webinars is available to view at your leisure on the CLA's YouTube page. There's a handy playlist that includes all of our past programs in chronological order, and we hope that as you think about the stewardship of your church's records, that you'll go back and listen to these past programs.

And now I'm going to turn it right back over to Kyle to kick off our program focused on this legacy process.

KYLE: Great. Thanks so much, Zack. So as Zack said, today's a program on the legacy process and the role of archives in it.

Now we recognize that this is actually probably a program is going to be useful not just for folks in that process or who are, you know, contemplating what's happening, but for folks at any place, especially even with healthy churches. Having a fully developed archive can be a resource in many, many powerful ways.

For churches that are facing the completion of their ministry, we recognize the decision to close can be a very difficult and emotional one. And I think it's important for you to hear it's also part of a long-standing cycle. Churches opening and closing has been part of Christianity since the very start.

The quote on the screen is from Patrick Duggan of the United Church of Christ Church Building and Loan Fund. And I think it's a really instructive reminder.

He, Patrick, writes, "the end of ministry and mission in a particular community can be viewed as part of the continuing witness of Christ. The first local church started with the disciples' prayers from the upper room and the tongues of fire from the Holy Spirit. That church doesn't exist today. Yet every local church can trace its spiritual origins to that New Testament tradition. And like every local congregation that once existed and is no more, unless the Lord returns first, every local church in existence today will one day pass on its legacy to believers yet unknown."

So this is part of just a cycle that we know within Christianity. And, you know, that one way, though, that we can be... that a church to be remembered is through the preservation of its archives. Here at the Congregational Library & Archives, we are constantly reminded of these cycles of opening and closing.

What you see up here on the screen is a map that I made in preparation for a trip to the Pacific Northwest for a Congregational gathering last year. From this mapping, I was trying to figure out what we had for holdings. And I wanted to see, kind of the number of churches that we had.

And quickly it became clear that we had church collections from churches that are open, as well as ones that are closed. And there are 46 active Congregational churches in this part of the country. They are in red. And then there are nine closed churches, which you can see in blue.

Now, the blue churches remind us again of this cycle, right, that churches open and close. But these are all churches for which we have records, right, for which we have collected some material that allows us to go back and understand the mission and memory of that church.

Looking at a resource we use quite a bit here, this is Rick Taylor's *Congregational Churches of the West*. And Rick Taylor has created sort of the authoritative guide to any Congregational Christian church that's ever existed. It soon became clear that what you're looking at on the screen is really only a fraction of the total number of Congregational churches that have opened and closed.

Those, the number of churches that have, that have ever existed in that region, numbers in the hundreds, significantly more than what you see here. And the challenge is we don't have records on them. We might have a passing reference to them. But we don't here at the library, have anything more, you know. So that if your ancestors were part of that church, we really don't have a lot for folks to look at.

And we think that's a challenge. And we think that's something that can be rectified in the legacy process.

The community focus of Congregational churches means that they create lots of local records. Every Congregational church asserts its scriptural right to maintain its independence in both the government and administration of its affairs.

And so, one of the things we celebrate as Congregationalists is that our churches are autonomous and independent in affairs relating to their own lives, all the while sharing an interdependent relationship within and beyond wider ecclesiastical bodies, such as associations and conferences.

So from the colonial period to the present day, the local Congregational church has been a central gathering place and an advocate for social justice within the community. Here people baptized their young, taught their children, married their beloveds, supported the less well-off through voluntary societies, enjoyed fellowship with their neighbors, sponsored a wide array of missions, and in the end buried their dead.

Generations of community members are carefully documenting this story in meeting minutes, and pastoral records, and directories, and weekly bulletins, and newspaper articles, and photographs, and so many other documents. And all of those are materials gathered by the church over its history.

So it's not going to surprise you that here at the Congregational Library, we firmly believe that ensuring the preservation of all the materials that a church gathers in its lifetime is an important part to be considered in the legacy process.

Now, sometimes there are extenuating circumstances why the records of a church have not survived: fires, floods, human carelessness have all been factors in the life of a church over the centuries. Each of these can shape what from the historical record has actually been preserved.

Yet when the legacy process has been completed, when the building has been sold, the last members relocated to new congregations, the ministries wrapped up, it is the archive, when properly cared for, which can live on.

The archive perpetuates the memory and the mission of the church. Thus, the decisions made by the legacy committee in regards to the dispensation of the archive can directly impact how generations of people who worshiped in the church are remembered. And remember, owing to the Congregational church's distinct structure, the records of a church are also the records of that larger community.

In so many New England towns before the American Revolution, the Congregational church was the only church. So if you're looking for a record for somebody who lived during that time, it's going to be most likely in the church's records.

We totally get that the legacy process is difficult. We talk to so many churches who are going through this process, and we realize that determining the future of the church's records might be the eighth or ninth thing on the committee's checklist. There are lots of other pressing things that need to be done.

Yet we'll argue today, and we'll argue when we talk to you in person, that the benefits of caring for your archive in the legacy process really are twofold.

That in doing this work now, in thinking about what the future of your archive will be, you ensure that the mission and memory of your church is preserved, and perhaps in ways that no other choice that you make will ensure that their mission and memory are preserved.

And maybe equally importantly, that the materials in your archive are, in fact, essential for many of the stages of bringing your church's ministry to completion.

And so with that, let me hand the mic back over to Zachary. We'll talk you through how to use the archive in the legacy process.

ZACHARY: Thank you so much, Kyle.

Now that we discussed the important link between the archive and the legacy process, let's start thinking about how we document the legacy of your church. Specifically, we want to introduce the concept of a legacy study guide.

Now, this isn't something that we've come up with ourselves. It's based off of a resource that was first produced by the UCC. But it is an exercise that we actually find really helpful when thinking and talking about the legacy process, regardless of denominational affiliation.

It is also an exercise which really and truly highlights the importance of archival records to that legacy process.

So what is the legacy study guide?

Well, there's a few ways to think about it, but primarily I want to think about it as a versatile toolkit for understanding your church's history and presenting that information for other people.

The exercise of researching and writing to fill out the study guide will help you to think about and explore your church's history from a few different angles, and to think more deeply about the ever-changing culture and mission of your church.

The legacy study guide itself is a series of questions that need answering. These questions encourage you to think about the founding of your church; to explore the good and the bad times; to think about your church's community impact; to look at the ebb and flow of membership; and to think about how the mission, covenants, and goals of the church have manifested throughout the church's history.

So why do we need to think about creating a legacy study guide?

Well, first off, I do want to say that this is a useful exercise, even if your church is not actively engaging in the legacy process. Most practically, having the answers to the guide's questions around will always be helpful whenever someone needs to look up the history of the church, or even write a new history for the church.

The mission- and community-based questions in the study guide are similar to those you might see about community impact in typical grant applications. Having a handy source of answers to such questions can make the grant writing exercise way less daunting.

A lot of the information documented by the study guide can also be immensely helpful if, for example, you ever need to write an application to have a building recognized in the Registry of Historic Places, or to have local government support the placement of a plaque or historic marker related to your church.

If a church is winding down its operations, though, then having a filled out study guide can really be useful when thinking about the legacy of the church and how to honor its legacy, such as through the charitable disbursement of assets.

Finally, because the study guide really does require looking at the church's archival records, it becomes an excellent excuse to gather together your church's archive.

This is where I submit, my contractual plug for our past CSI programs, because they cover the how's and what's of starting and maintaining a church archive.

The question, then is how do you make your legacy study guide?

Well, on that front, there is unfortunately no single answer.

Is it the work of a single person or a whole committee? I'd generally vote committee, but either way, this is a decision that should be made early on in the entire legacy process. Engagement with the community is vital.

So how will you involve them? Perhaps you ask the community to supply their own answers to the study guide questions. Really, it is up to you.

Finally, as I've stated before, this is an exercise that requires you to dive into your church's own records. As you work to complete the guide, you'll learn a lot about the state of the archive itself.

Use this work, then, as an opportunity to also document the archive. Note where you found information. Create labels for church records volumes. Organize old filing cabinets. And perhaps most importantly, work with the community to gather together resources which may have been dispersed to the wider community over the decades.

I want to state that the questions presented here as the study guide are not exhaustive. There's quite a lot, but they are fairly generalized. So I encourage you to think about how you might want to add onto these questions. Every story is unique, so feel free to adapt the following questions in your own way to best reflect the unique story of your church.

The questions began relatively simply, focusing on the very founding of your church. Whether that was 20 years ago or 200 years ago, there is an important story held in the founding of your church.

Who were the early leaders and members, and why did they wish to start a new church? Did they separate from a larger church on the other side of town? Was the church seeded by the home missions board?

Dive into why your church was founded and what the original mission of the church was. Knowing from where your church began can be an incredibly illuminating discovery.

But where do you find answers for these questions I've listed? Well, I've also listed a few potential sources for you to begin your research.

Let's start with the earliest church record books. If these exist, they will often list the founding members, as well as include a copy of the church's covenant, confession of faith, and/or their bylaws. Registers, which typically only document membership data, may specifically include lists of ministers, deacons, and other lay leaders dating all the way back to the founding.

For those churches that were seeded by another church, separated from another church, or were seeded by the home missions board, look at early correspondence in your collection to see if any of it was to and from those organizations. If such correspondence exists, it can tell you a whole lot about the how's and why's of a church's founding.

If your church has ever produced a church history, look at that too. They can be a useful starting point, especially when it comes to certain basic facts about your church: think dates of founding, or lists of settled ministers. However, do not take those church histories as pure fact. Rather, I would think of them as a different lens through which to explore your church's history. It can be surprising how often church histories written in different time periods, can view the same events from wildly different lenses. When you do spot those differences, though, make note of them. They could potentially reveal a lot about how your church has viewed its own story throughout its history.

I will also say that it can be surprising how often histories do get small details wrong. Having gone through a lot of these, I can not tell you how often I have run into conflicting information on when church buildings were constructed, for example. So definitely fact check any church histories you do look at.

The next category of questions is all based on your building's history. These questions are focused on documenting the construction, maintenance, and changes made to your church building. While the primary focus is on the church building itself, you could also easily include the history of a parsonage or other buildings that your church has owned and operated.

Some of the questions are also focused on the story of how land was acquired. Was it a gift or a purchase? From whom did the land come from? What was the story of that land before your church building was built?

If the information exists, you should also look to see where the church met during times when there wasn't a sanctuary to gather in. Did the members meet at another church? Were perhaps meetings rotated between the homes of different members?

Did the church building ever experience a disaster, such as a flood or a fire? How did the church community respond to such events?

The financing of church buildings can also actually be quite interesting. For older churches in New England, perhaps they were funded by the sale of pews. If so, when and why did the church abolish individual ownership of pews? In more modern contexts, how did the church raise funds for new building or renovations and expansions? Was it entirely self-funded, or was their outreach to wider extended communities or organizations?

Many of these answers can be found in meeting minutes from pretty much all periods of your church's history. These records and the annual reports are probably the best places to look for how the church worked to construct and renovate buildings.

Deeds, mortgages, and similar legal records, if you have access to them, can also be incredibly illuminating. If your church can't locate a deed, I would check with your town or county. It's a possibility they might have a copy.

For the New Englanders here, the earliest church meetinghouses were often public property. The functions of the meetinghouse building itself were often recorded in what are known as parish records. So if you have parish records, check there for early building history.

One theme I noticed when reading, particularly 19th century histories of churches, is how often they will gloss over times of change and turbulence. In the New England example, the 19th century is when a lot of Congregational churches had separations for a wide variety of theological differences. The Unitarian split in many parishes, in particular, could be especially bitter. But so often these divides are barely recorded, if recorded at all, in the written histories of the time period. This legacy study guide, though, encourages you to look at these periods of turbulence, explore their causes, their resolutions, and their lasting impacts.

One question I do want to make special note of here is the one which asks what names the church has had. As an archivist, that is a question that haunts me. Sometimes, church name changes are easy to document, but sometimes it becomes a nightmare trying to figure out when and why a name change has occurred. All of this is to say that if your church has had different names in the past, you should absolutely document what those names were, when they were used, and why they were changed. As for sources, once again, church histories can prove to be quite useful, though the caveats I presented earlier absolutely still apply. Meeting minutes are also likely to have actively reported on ongoing controversies in the church, especially if they affected membership numbers.

Speaking of, sudden spikes in membership transfers or gaps in membership records could indicate a time period of change or turbulence, so keep an eye out for those as you look at registers. Correspondence with regional associations or a convened ecclesiastical council can also be indicative of a controversy getting so bad as to require external mediation.

Financial history might not sound particularly interesting, but it's important to have the questions presented here documented somewhere. Even if your church isn't progressing through the legacy process, it's a good idea to have a handle on what kinds of special funds and budget items have existed in your church's history. Restricted funds, named funds, memorial funds, the fund drives for the likes of bells and organs all likely have their own origin stories. And these are stories which absolutely should be documented, but are too often forgotten.

Financial records will often have you looking at financial ledger books. Sometimes individual funds have their own ledgers, but often times these funds are listed as line items in much larger ledgers. Some funds may have reports included in the annual reports, so that's also a good place to look for information.

For information about general or specific fundraising efforts, beyond the minutes, you can always look at bulletins and newsletters too, if available, as financial appeals are likely to have been included in those kinds of documents.

The story of a church is the story of its community. And often the community work done by the church is one of its most lasting legacies. We want to look at community impact as well as your own membership history.

Knowing the ebb and flow of membership numbers can reveal a lot about the history of the church. These peaks and troughs can help define eras within your church, or maybe compare it against demographic changes at the local and national levels.

We also encourage you to look deeply at the auxiliary groups which operated out of your church. This can include everything from the sewing circles of the 19th century, to the social groups in the Sunday School. No matter the mission or purpose of these various auxiliary groups, they played an important role in your church's history and should each be named and documented, if possible.

Another important area to look at, especially when thinking about the lasting legacy of your church, is to think about who your church has partnered with over the years. What causes has your church most vocally supported and rallied behind, and what mission-based organizations has your church partnered with or supported, either financially or with manpower, over time?

As for sources, auxiliary groups will often have had their own record books and their own sections in the annual report. Newsletters and calendars might also include information on when groups met and what activities they put on.

We've talked already about member registers, but membership records might also be recorded as membership cards, especially in more modern times, through transfer slips, or as

part of the general church records volumes, as usually in their own separate sections towards the front of the book, depending on when the book was made. Sunday schools will often have their own set of record books, as well as a section in the annual report.

While the last slide looked internally at your church community, I also want to encourage you to look wider towards the communities which surround your church. Your church was founded by a specific community whose roots are strongly associated with the time and place of that founding. But a lot can happen over time, and not just for the oldest churches. Rapid urbanization in the West, for example, brought huge demographic changes very quickly. So you shouldn't only document the cultural roots of your church's founding, but also explore how the church has changed alongside the world, culture, and community it inhabits.

Finding sources about your church external to your own records can perhaps be the most time consuming and difficult, but I promise you it is a rewarding exercise.

Look at your local libraries first. They may have their own newspaper repositories and also have town histories, which may note the activity of your church. Your local library and historical society, or even statewide museums can have a lot of useful resources for understanding how your church fits into the wider community that surrounds it.

Census records can also be used to document changing demographics in your region, or town, or county. If you don't want to wade specifically in the census records themselves, I will say Wikipedia will often have some top level demographic census data for your town or county on its appropriate wiki page.

I hope these questions from this study guide, as they have been presented here, are a useful launching point for you as you think about documenting your church's history through the legacy process and to think about its legacy moving forward.

Now, I will turn this over to my colleague Billy, to talk about the process of donating church records.

BILLY MCCARTHY: Thank you to Zack and everyone watching us today.

Now that we've had just a small chance to talk about sort of what living legacy means and to go through that kind of study guide, I want to briefly discuss finding and working with an archive to maintain your church's records going forward. My hope with this whole program is that no matter what situation your church finds yourself in today, that you recognize the need to formulate a plan around your church's records.

I'm just gonna briefly go over working with archives and maintaining church records. As always, your own personal situation in your own churches might differ slightly, but, you know,

I feel these steps are going to make sure you don't have to scramble to eventually find a home for your archives.

You will want to start to begin by thinking about where your records are actually located and try to start gathering them into 1 or 2 locations whenever possible. I would really recommend that you send out a message to all of the church members asking them if they or their families have had any church records in their own homes. It's honestly very common for records to have been dispersed to individual families, especially if that church went through any kind of, like, renovation, or natural disaster, or other kind of building-related change.

And then as part of that process, you can also try to determine if records have already been housed at an archive or other cultural heritage center. If possible, try to speak with the oldest members of your church or even previous ministers, to see if they know more about where material might be or if it was sent somewhere specific.

Both Kyle and Zack have noted, this is a time-consuming process. And waiting until the end of the legacy process, which, unfortunately, is very common, is really not going to be ideal for you or the place that ends up taking on your records.

I now want to talk just a little bit about finding and selecting an archive. If you already know that some records are in an archive already, start with them. That's always, we really recommend records staying with records in the same location.

So I have broken down the categories of archives into local and denominational. You can think of local as your town or city's historical society, local college or university, or other kinds of institutions, which I would say consist of a town hall, a library, or a local area museum.

Besides local options, denominational archives are, of course, something to consider. For those of us joining from within Congregationalism, it's important to remind you that the UCC, the CCCC, and the NACCC do not collect individual church records. But we of course, here at the CLA most certainly do collect from all angles of Congregationalism.

And I have a list that I'll mention momentarily. I would give my advice is to start with your local historical society and then move out from there. Obviously not every historical society can steward an archive. But we really do encourage churches to try that first.

And to attempt to keep records physically close to the community they describe whenever possible. Regardless of who you choose to contact, we again highly recommend approaching these places early in your legacy discussion to fully understand what your options are. And so, on our end as an institution, we can prepare to take these records on.

Please, please do not wait until the day your building is sold to reach out to an archive. Once you've determined a place that might serve as a good home for your church records, the next step would be to reach out and contact them.

For smaller institutions, there's usually just a single phone number or email that you can go with. And that would be where I suggest to start.

Some larger institutions might have a staff page. And then you can kind of go through it and look for their staff archivist. But if you're having trouble figuring out who to contact, just go with the general number. It'll get to the right person eventually.

If the archive is potentially interested in taking on your collection, it would be good for you to have a couple bits of information ready. That would include where you currently are in the legacy process, a projected size of the material in the archive in boxes, the current state of the archive, and then any hard deadlines you might have for moving out the records from where they currently are. Usually this is in the case of a building sale. And of course, they'll follow up back with you, if they have any other questions.

From there, each archive has its own kind of process for deciding how to move forward. As an example, you know, here at the CLA, we've mentioned our set of collecting categories, which sort of, defines how we move forward with what we do and do not take.

Once you know what the particular archive you've chosen doesn't want, church staff should then go through and try to separate out those materials before transferring them to their archive.

So, on this slide are some of the denominational repositories that I want everyone to keep in mind. First is us here at the CLA. Then we have the Afro-Christian Convention Archives of the Franklinton Center at Bricks, the Amistad Research Center, Elon University, the E&R Library & Archives, and finally, the Evangelical Synod Archives at the Eden Theological Seminary.

If you are joining or listening later from a denomination that's not mentioned here, and/or you're just not sure if an archive may exist, feel free to either reach out to us or to the applicable administration, and I'm sure they'll be able to tell you where to go.

I already mentioned that archives... we're gonna tell you what we don't want to take. But I'm gonna go out on a limb and say some things are universal. So this would include human resource records, more recent financial records, bank account information, and private information such as Social Security numbers. Additionally, you're gonna want to make sure you work with your lawyers to make sure you're not passing along any legal records.

I would also plug specifically our CSI program titled "To Keep or Not to Keep," which really focuses in on retention record policies. And it can be helpful to kind of clear this stuff out before you even think about being in the legacy process.

So you may be asking, you know, what do we do with this stuff that the archives don't want to take? Examples that we see most often are, Bibles, artifacts, paintings, and other kind of similar, usually 3-D objects.

What I usually suggest to people, start with the community. Have a list of what's available, and see if anyone wants to take them. From there, if there's still stuff left, you can consider reaching out to other churches in your denomination, other denominations in your area, or anyone else you can think of in the community that might be interested.

Specifically for items like Bibles, we get this a lot. I would really consider either donate them to another church. You can offer them for free on Facebook or something similar. And there are dozens of organizations that will take Bibles and usually kind of repurpose them or send them to other places. So those are always an option available.

If you can't find a home for material, and stressing that I am an archivist, this is something that I also do here. It's okay to throw stuff away. Not everything needs to be kept. And some items simply do not have a new home to find. I recognize that this can be very difficult for people. And I'm hoping that if you hear it from me, a trained professional, that will ease the burden, even if it's just a slight bit. So, I talked very, very briefly just about how to find and work with an archive. And there's a lot more to it. And these archives, ourselves included, will help you in every step of the way.

But I also want to be clear how you can kind of incorporate where you decide to take your collections in your church's closing ceremony. You know, as we've laid out, you should know and have selected an archive before you reach your closing ceremony whenever possible. As such, I encourage that you, that they should be included as part of that ceremony since they're gonna be one of the primary connecting pieces between the church, its community, and its shared memory going forward. At minimum, there should just be some acknowledgment that the archive is taking on particular church records, as well as some sort of method of contacting said archive if people want to visit the records now and in the future.

And then my final quick point here is just gonna be on financial support. A financial donation will help ensure the archives of your choice can keep these stories accessible for future members of the community, as well as the larger a community of students, scholars, church members, and anyone interested in learning more about the religion of America.

You know, when archives arrive at our library, you know, we need to rehouse them in acid-free boxes to protect their contents from disintegration, organize the records in such a way to ensure that similar materials are grouped together, and inventory to make the materials easily

discoverable for users. We need to make sure that our storage, as well as our offsite storage, is properly climate controlled to protect records for the long term.

On another angle, we answer here at the CLA hundreds of reference requests that rely on these records being easily accessible. And those most often involve those community connections we keep talking about through genealogy, the writing of histories, and you name it.

Your financial support makes all of the stuff I just said possible. So do consider your archives when the time comes for the dispersal of money.

So the legacy process is one that I recognize involves a lot of physical, spiritual, and intellectual effort. The archives are a tool to help shoulder some of that burden, especially for the future.

Working well in advance of the sale of your building to foster a relationship with an archive is really a crucial part of this work. And I hope this very brief overview helps guide you in all of those efforts. And with that, I'm going to stop, bring back Kyle, and answer some questions.

KYLE: Excellent.

I mean, so, Billy, I wonder if you could talk a little just to get us started about what are the kind of pros and cons of working with the denominational archive as opposed to a local archive?

BILLY: Sure.

So, the benefits for a denominational archive, excuse me. It can provide context. So you're gonna be, your collections are gonna be surrounded with other collections of the same denomination. People are gonna probably just expect that it's there. Most people that want to come for Congregational churches tend to find us.

It can complement other materials that are already inside of the archive. So if you're focusing on a specific subject, say like Sunday schools, having just another example of that really helps flesh out the story.

And then also, there just might not be a local community archive option. It really just depends on the town. I've seen towns of like 500 people have a really robust historical society, and then some that just have nothing.

Concerns?

The biggest one is gonna be distance. We're located in Boston. If you are located in the Midwest, we have a lot of stuff from Chicago. That's quite a large distance. So sometimes that can be a bit of a pain trying to get here.

And the other one is that... it's part of the collection might already be in another archive. That's why I mentioned it at the start... is we really don't like taking incomplete or split archives. We really always recommend keeping everything together in one holistic location.

So those are just a couple. There's more. But I think those kind of lay out the obvious ones.

KYLE: That last one, I think, is so important. You know, just in the last year, the three of us have worked with two different churches.

One who had given part of their collection here, what, in the 1960s. And then they made the choice to come to completion in the past couple of months. And so they brought the rest of their collection. So now we have the full, you know, 125 you know, 130 years of that church, a separate church had given their collection to the local historical society in the 1960s. And, you know, that in deciding they really liked us, but, in thinking about, you know, they should keep their archive complete. And so they're going to have their materials go there.

I think that it doesn't really do anybody any service to have a little bit here and a little bit there.

BILLY: Yeah.

KYLE: And I'm sure from you in the in the reference perspective, you certainly don't want to be chasing down questions that pertain to collections in a different archive.

BILLY: Yes. I've ended up doing a lot of sleuthing to find material that kind of coincides with things that we have, and it's, time consuming.

[LAUGHTER]

KYLE: All right, so, turning to our questions here. Catherine Spinella asks, should we keep newspaper clippings in the archives, since so much of that is available online now?

BILLY: I can just jump in on this one.

The way we always handle newspaper articles or clippings: scan them or photocopy them. Cut around the parts that talk about your church. Try to keep the title and day of the article as well.

But besides that, the actual original newspaper articles themselves, that paper is not meant to last. And there's really nothing you can do to stop... You can mitigate, but it's going to fall apart. We always recommend photocopying articles. Keep a physical copy and toss out the originals.

You are correct that a lot of stuff is digitized. However, newspapers.com is a proprietary source, so you never know what's gonna change. So while you have a copy available, I suggest keeping the copy.

KYLE: And I think it's fair to say that if you don't have the... if you're not in a position to make a more permanent copy, you know, a photocopy or a scan at your church, that is part of the work that an archivist will do when a collection comes in. Is that correct?

BILLY: Yeah, it's something that we would do in the process, you know, within the processing queue. It's just, it can scale. So, it can be, not super fun when there's 200 articles to photocopy.

So if you have a lot, future archivists would very much appreciate it. But as always, if your situation means you aren't able to, we understand that as well.

KYLE: Wonderful comment here from Wallace Bowie III, who says you have no idea how helpful this is. Thank you so much for this.

So thank you, Wallace, for being here. We appreciate... And we're glad that we're offering programs that are of value.

Bert Marshall asked, great question, how do you deal with the digital archives? Zack, do you want to, do you want to take that one?

ZACHARY: Sure.

Short answer is yes, we do, here at the CLA do take digital archives. However, if you do have digital materials, that is always going to be, or even just audiovisual materials, that is always going to be a discussion that you must have with the archivist before you deposit.

In general, if you're talking about archives in general, almost all of the time, digital materials are a part of the discussion on what is collected. Just because digital materials and the safety and security of those materials is such a complex topic.

Generally speaking, if you are giving over digital materials, there must always be a discussion prior to the handoff of those materials to discuss the scope, how that material handoff will actually happen. And to discuss any concerns or problems that could arise.

KYLE: Maybe dig a little deeper into what you're talking about here, Zack.

Is it fair to say that not all archives have similar capacity for preserving digital archives? Is that part of the issue?

ZACHARY: That's part of the issue. Many archives don't have any capacity to make digital materials accessible.

Which is, we do have the ability to make things accessible, which is the main reason we can take materials.

Preservation is a massive concern.

And then many repositories just have different collecting policies. And sometimes that just means they don't... their collecting policies specifically state they don't take or only take very limited types of digital material. So, and that's just up to individual, the individual repositories.

So that's why I always say if digital is on the, is a part of the discussion, to always add it to the list of things to discuss because different repositories handle digital materials very differently.

KYLE: That's great. Thank you for the clarifying answer.

And good to, you know, and good to reiterate that here at the Congregational Library, we've been working towards, I don't think we are at 100% in where we want to be in our support for digital, but it is one of the areas that we have named as continuing to develop, our ability to support.

Kristen Johnson asked, do you recommend having certain articles appraised for their value before depositing in an archive?

ZACHARY: So archivists themselves, do not handle appraisal. So, we as a service, and actually it's sort of like written into our rules of conduct. Basically, we don't provide any monetary appraisal. So it's hard for me to say what you should or should not do on that front.

If for tax reasons, you need to have a monetary value attached to a donation of records, then yes, I guess. But, at least on the archival side, monetary value is rarely, if ever, really a part of the discussion, except in rare cases that mostly involve authors and large university repositories.

KYLE: Yeah, and I think the, for the collections that have come out in here over the last several years, I don't think there's been an instance of any of them doing an appraisal on the archive.

Largely because it's not, you know, it shouldn't be treated as a financial asset, right? It's different than having, you know, a work of fine art. Or it's different than having your church building, right, because you're doing something different with that.

So unless the lawyer that you're working with in your closing process is really pushing the appraisal, don't really feel, don't think that you have to have that on your, on your checklist.

If they, if the lawyer is, or the conference minister that you're working with is pushing for that, oftentimes archivists will know of people in the field, usually dealer, book dealers, who they can recommend.

But just to reiterate, archives themselves never put an appraisal value on objects. And if they are doing that, you should think twice. Because that's not our business to do that.

Great question here from David Dewey: Excellent presentation. Thank you. Are there costs associated with services provided by the CLA?

And I can jump in on that, or Billy, do you want to go?

BILLY: Go ahead. You can go ahead.

KYLE: Sure. The answer is no. Well, there are costs associated with what we do. There's, you know, the cost of doing this work.

Generally, when we have a conversation with an archive, we'll make a recommendation for a suggested donation if that church is distributing its final financial assets.

Here in the state of Massachusetts, I think it's the case in many other states, that when a church is closing, it is required to distribute its assets, its financial assets to other 501(c)(3) organizations that share a similar mission. Congregational churches since the 17th century have been sites for ministry and education. The Congregational Library is a site for ministry and education. We share your mission. So we are approved by the Attorney General's office as a place for the gifting of financial assets.

And what we can do is based on the size of the archive, based on the conservation needs, perhaps, that come with it, based on what it would take to inventory and to sustain it in the long term, provide, you know, an estimated amount that we would, you know, think would be appropriate for the work that we're gonna have to put into preserving it.

If you're an active church, that's a slightly different area. We're still really kind of working out what it means to work with active churches. We absolutely want to be there to support.

We will say that the best church archive is an archive in a living church. You know, having that archive in your community that you can take care of gives you... is the best possible scenario. But we also recognize that that's not always possible.

In that scenario, if you're an active church giving your collection here, what we often ask is that you become an institutional member as the church, you know, and you just support our actions, you know, with a membership gift through your missions board each year.

Wonderful question here from Matt Stowell: Would you rather have the original documents or scanned versions of the of the records?

BILLY: I can take that one.

Whenever possible, we always want originals. There are always exceptions, like, I just mentioned about the newspaper articles. That's kind of the outlier. Is like, we would always prefer, like, a physical copy.

But, kind of, one of my little things I always like to say: paper has been king. Paper will always be king. At the end of the day, paper can't go away. Some forms of paper can, of course. But in general, paper is the medium that can survive the longest.

With digital records, it can really get a little wacky. We have 350 plus microfilm reels that exemplify what can happen when you move original documents onto a digital medium that does not really plan for long-term sustainability. We're finding that today with CDs. Only two of the computers on site have the ability to read CDs now. So that's just another example.

There are exceptions all the time. But in general, we prefer originals.

KYLE: It'll be fascinating when we're talking in 25 years, to see what file formats that we're using right now are not supported then. I mean, I think that digital is just changing so rapidly.

But as you say, you know, we've had paper for a long time now, and we know that we can preserve it.

I love this question from Michelle Beadle. Michelle asks, broadening the lens out, you know, a lot of the emphasis on this conversation has been, and this program has been on congregations. But do you have wisdom about the value of mapping the legacy of a full association of covenanted group of congregations?

So, for those of you who might not be Congregationalists, our kind of structure is the congregation is the kind of center. It's self-governing and autonomous, but it always joins, tries to join in fellowship first with associations, which are kind of regional groupings of

congregations. And then a conference, which might be a state or multi-state gathering of those churches.

So associations we actually work with, we're working with the folks up in New Hampshire right now. Talk a little bit about the value of association records.

ZACHARY: Yeah.

So, yeah, we actively collect association records and conference records from here in New England primarily, although we also have conference records from Midwest and out West.

But yeah, these are, we view these as incredibly important and valuable records. The Connecticut Records is a really great example of a collection we have here that's very, very complete. And those records go all the way back to the consociations of the 18th century. And you can see the ecclesiastical records from that time period, the ways in which people, ministers from different areas were coming together to discuss certain topics, to help mediate controversies, and to ordain new ministers in their regions.

So, yes, these are all incredibly important records that document a lot of the programmatic and sort of outreach work that these conferences are doing to whole regions of communities and churches, and how the individual churches fit into these larger communities, and how the communications between them are, is all incredibly fascinating.

I will say, yes, the questions and the study guide that I presented here today are largely focused on single congregations. However, going sort of what I said previously, if you tweak some of those questions just a little bit, I think most of them can apply to a conference or an association as well.

So if you are a conference or association, who is trying to think of its legacy right now... perhaps you're going through a downsizing of your office, or perhaps you're in the process of a merger of some sort... I know Pennsylvania just recently is in the process, or has officially merged four different conferences into a single one. So these are great times to think about your legacy, and to gather, and think of these types of questions, and write out answers to them.

KYLE: And we recently did a program a couple months ago with the New Hampshire associations, which voted and as of March 1st became the Granite State Association. And there were 7 or 8 associations that merged into that.

If you are going through that process or anything approximate, we have a workshop on it, so reach out. We'd be very happy to offer that, for free to your group. So.

Well, great questions here. We are two minutes over our time. We're gonna send out the slides from today to everybody who registered.

Please, please, please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions that you have.

And as Zack told us at the beginning, the programs we do come off the suggestions that you all offer to us. So keep those suggestions coming in. If they're topics you haven't seen yet, let us know. We want to get those programs out to you.

Take care. Be well, everyone, and we'll see you at the next program.