Historical Resources in the Local Church: A Field Report on a Largely Gay and Lesbian Congregation

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Abstract

The author presents a consultative field study report describing how the archives and historical records collection of a congregation associated with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches were organized with little personnel resources and financial support. Details are given concerning the religious, political, social, and cultural aspects that influenced the design of the collection. Rationale and examples are given concerning how the controlled-vocabulary subject file was built and how descriptive catalog records and folders of manuscript items were developed. Problems related to continued development of the collection and to the need for electronic access to records are also discussed.

Introduction

Defining a Homophile Church. This discussion reports experiences gained from a consultation effort to establish and place in operation a management plan for an archival and historical resources collection for a medium-sized church[1] of some 300 active members.[2] The term "homophile," as used in this article, is adapted from Warner, and in his words, "refers not to homosexuals per se, but to those who support the right of homosexuals."[3] The special characteristics of the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches that set it apart from other Christian

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[1] Lyle E. Schaller, *The Middle-Sized Church: Problems & Prescriptions* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985).

[2] This church carries only active members on its roles, as church by-laws require that all non-active members be stricken from the official church membership list periodically.

[3] R. Stephen Warner, "The Metropolitan Community Churches and the Gay Agenda: The Power of Pentecostalism and Essentialism," in *Sex, Lies, and Sanctity: Religion and Deviance in Contemporary North America*, edited by Mary Jo Neitz and Marion S. Goldman (Greenwich, Conn.: JAI Press, 1995), 82.

congregations and which clearly define it as a homophile denomination will be explained later in this discussion.

Archival Guides for Local Congregations. Although available, the literature that supports small- to medium-sized churches in their efforts to establish and maintain archives and historical collections is not extensive nor easily available. Churches and religious-related institutions that have published guides on this topic include the United Methodist Church, the Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, Presbyterian Church in America, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Yale Divinity School Library. *An Archival Primer* by Martha Lund Smalley, *A Manual for Small Archives* by the Archives Association of British Columbia, *Places of Worship: Exploring Their History* by James Wind, and Evelyn R. Ling's *Archives in the Church or Synagogue Library* also offer elementary advice on archival management.[4] However, neither UFMCC nor any of its congregations appear to have developed any guidelines for historical preservation or archival development.

Defining Archives. Ling defines archives as "permanently valuable records in what ever form they have been created or received,"[5] and she lists among these: official records, publications, oral histories, photographs and paintings, biographical materials, memorabilia, denominational records, unofficial correspondences, news clippings, books of a historical nature, and other items such as curriculum materials and descriptions and comments written about the church. Paying attention to the principle of keeping similar records together, she further implies that the archivist is free to organize the records in ways that enhance their use within the given corporate structure, provided the arrangement can be explained simply to others.[6] She likewise gives permission to the archivist to remove selected items for special storage.[7]

Field Report

Background

In this project the author acted as a consultant and performed much of the file organization and administration for the Metropolitan Community

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[4] James P. Wind, *Places of Worship: Exploring Their History* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1990); Archives Association of British Columbia, *A Manual for Small Archives* (Vancouver, 1994); Evelyn R. Ling, *Archives in the Church or Synagogue Library* (Bryn Mawr, Penn.: Church and Synagogue Library Association, 1981). See also, Historical Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention, *Resource Kit for Your Church's History* (Nashville, 1984); Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, *Preserving African-American Religious Documents. A Guideline for Churches and Other Religious Institutions* (New York, 1990).

[5] Ling, *Archives in the Church or Synagogue Library,* 11.

[6] Ling, *Archives in the Church or Synagogue Library,* 15.

[7] Ling, *Archives in the Church or Synagogue Library,* 16.

Church of Austin Inc. (MCCA), located in Austin, Texas. MCCA is a local church congregation associated with the Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, Inc. (UFMCC). UFMCC is a national and international church-body that has a worldwide membership of over 40,000. It was organized in 1968 by the Rev. Troy Perry in Los Angeles to serve the needs of what Perry and his followers felt were disenfranchised peoples who had been rejected by mainline Christian churches, namely gays and lesbians.[8]

From its beginning, UFMCC became highly involved in the social and political struggles of the 1960s, and it quickly adopted ''liberation theory''[9] and a human rights agenda as basic approaches to explaining scripture and defining church order and mission.[10] UFMCC sees itself today as having ''created an environment where *all people* are accepted, affirmed, and celebrated because of who they are (children of God in infinite variety) and not in spite of an aspect of who they are (such as their sexual orientation).''[11]

Nevertheless, throughout its history, UFMCC congregations have been subject to attack and vandalism. Several churches have even been destroyed by arson or suspected arson,[12] and as late as December 1995 an UFMCC congregation in Florida was refused the right to participate in a civic Christmas parade because parade organizers did not feel the church's presence would be appropriate within the context of the parade's theme and purpose.[13]

UFMCC's ideology, theology, and definition of place in social development have naturally affected MCCA. Over the years MCCA has participated in marches, demonstrations, and political awareness events, and has generally been involved in many local and national social causes, with much of this involvement reflected in its archives.

MCCA was founded in 1975 as an independent church called Austin Independent Community Church and it sought affiliation with UFMCC in 1976. It was chartered as a full member by the fellowship in 1978. In 1976 it also asked for membership in the local area Council of Churches, but membership was denied based on the Council's traditional biblical interpretation

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[8] *Yearbook of American & Canadian Churches*, Kenneth B. Bedell, ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 142, 296.

[9] H. M. Conn, ''Liberation Theology,'' in *New Dictionary of Theology*, edited by S.B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), 389–91.

[10] Troy Perry with Thomas L. P. Swicegood, *Don't Be Afraid Anymore: The Story of Reverend Troy D. Perry & the Metropolitan Community Churches* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992); also see ''Metropolitan Community Churches, Fellowship of,'' in *The Encyclopedia of American Religions*, 3d ed., edited by Gordon Melton (Detroit: Gale Research, 1987), 960–61; Warner, ''The Metropolitan Community Churches,'' 81–109.

[11] ''Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches,'' available at <http://www.ualberta.ca/~cbidwell/UFMCC/uf-home.htm>.

[12] J. Gordon Melton, *The Encyclopedic Handbook of Cults in America*, rev. and updated ed. (New York: Garland, 1986), 368.

[13] ''Parade Bans Gay Church, Stirring Key West,'' *New York Times*, 2 December 1995.

of homosexuality. In its rejection letter to the church, the Council wrote that the idea of homosexuality was not compatible with scripture. The church has not pursued membership since that time. In fact, UFMCC's application for membership in the National Council of Churches has also been denied, based in no small part on a threat by Orthodox churches to leave the council should UFMCC receive membership.[14]

The State of Archival Development within UFMCC

At this time, UFMCC as a national church organization has issued no guidelines or directives concerning the organization of archival materials for its member congregations, and at its national headquarters it has only just begun to consider an archival program. Bibliographic records reported to OCLC, the *National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections,* and independent listings indicate that only a few local UFMCC congregations have had their materials acquired by archives. This occurs for the most part when congregations have disbanded and their records are given to university and/or other collections. Only one congregation, the MCC of the Resurrection in Houston, currently maintains an archival collection, and this apparently is associated more with general gay and lesbian interests than with the local MCC congregation which houses it.[15]

Church leaders are well aware of the need for a national archival program, and the Rev. Troy Perry who currently holds a position on the denomination's Board of Elders has announced that one of his top priorities is the development of a UFMCC archives to be named after his mother and designed to celebrate gay and lesbian Christian identity and achievement. His plan has become more feasible with the purchase by UFMCC of a multistory headquarters building in West Hollywood, California, where the archives is to be located.[16]

Defining Archives within UFMCC and MCCA

Discussions with local MCCA administrators in 1995, coupled with remarks made by Perry, indicate that church leaders have a broad interpretation of the term "archives." Certain values and ideas about the church's archival program emerge in these talks and statements and suggest that a

[14] Bruce W. Robbins, "UFMCC and NCC: Unity Over Justice?" *Christianity and Crisis* 52 (January 1993): 424–25.

[15] "Lesbian and Gay Archives and Libraries List for the United States," available at <http://www.glinn.com/books.lar1.htm>.

[16] Troy Perry, Remarks made in a sermon delivered at Metropolitan Community Church of Austin, Austin, Texas, 16 October 1995.

standard definition and concept of archives may not be what the church has in mind. Words such as "our heritage," "our legacy," and "our history" occur often and apparently signify to church leaders that archives means resource collections of historical artifacts and documents, and not so much "collections of noncurrent records . . . preserved because of their continuing value,"[17] and, one might add, which often await researchers' analytical and probing eyes.

Local Church Records

It is said that crisis often leads to progress, and this may have happened with MCCA. Apparently the need for a local MCCA congregational archives program arose several years ago with the decision to celebrate the sixteenth anniversary of the local church's affliction with UFMCC. Leaders planned to develop a videotape history, but no centralized collection of historic items existed, and records from 1975 to 1989 were virtually inaccessible.

Historic items that presented the uniqueness of the life and character of the church, such as photographs, announcements, newsletters, and church bulletins were not only hidden away in storage but were interspersed among countless pieces of paper filed inconsistently. Other important items were held in the personal files of members and former members. These and other similar frustrations prompted the board of directors and its current minister to request that a formal church archives be established.

Organizational Principles

The heritage-center idea of archival records and services as articulated by the UFMCC and MCCA leadership influenced the organization of the present collection. With MCCA as the primary user group in mind, the central questions became: 1) how to develop a collection which would contribute to a sense of pride, historical heritage, and identity; 2) how to create an organizational system which would make those records accessible and useful; and 3) how to design a system that would be based on standardized archival procedures, yet manageable within this local church environment with its limited resources.

To ensure standardization, the primary principles of organization naturally had to be those based on provenance—maintaining original order. However, it was obvious that a controlled departure from provenance—perhaps controversial in terms of standard practice—would have to be made within safeguards set to protect provenance as much as possible. The decision to

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[17] Elizabeth Yakel, *Starting an Archives* (Metuchen, N.J.: Society of American Archivists and the Scarecrow Press, 1994), 1.

depart somewhat from strict provenance and to assign some items to special storage was based on practical considerations surrounding the expectations of current church leaderships and the organizational pattern in which the original material was found.

For example, official documents were often interspersed with other materials such as news clippings which came from beyond the creating body. Even when materials were obviously created by a unit within MCCA, it was often difficult to determine the hierarchical placement of the originating body. This seems to have resulted from the church's informal and very fluid administrative management and organizational structure that existed until recent years. Typically ad hoc committees were created to meet immediate problems or issues, with their origins and reporting framework obscured. Although undoubtedly useful for solving immediate church-related problems, such management practices did prove problematic with this project in terms of determining initial points of origins.

Although MCCA is a well-educated congregation, as noted previously, the idea of an archives is viewed largely as a means of celebrating heritage and pride and, in recent months as the church expands its property and activities, it has come to be seen by the leadership as a convenient means of storing, identifying, and quickly retrieving important church documents such as church incorporation papers. In practical terms, members and staff obviously expected that once the collection had been organized, a document or a series of documents could be retrieved upon demand with moderate effort. To honor this client expectation as much as possible and to facilitate practical use of the materials, the decision was made to divide the archives into two sections: 1) an archival records section (based on provenance), and 2) a historical records section based on a controlled vocabulary subject approach. The following discussion focuses largely on the development of the historical records section.

MCCA's Church Records, 1975-1993 and Beyond

By 1992 the administration of MCCA had placed the noncurrent materials dating from 1975 to 1989 in storage adjacent to the church. With the beginning of the formal archival program in 1995, approximately twenty boxes of materials were retrieved after two separate searches of the storage quarters. They were examined, and an organizational plan established. Later the church's administrative office released files dating from 1990 to 1993. Materials as now organized, dating from 1975 to 1993, amount to approximately 82 cubic feet. A records management policy has also been established and approved by the church's board of directors which will systematically bring later materials into the archives in an orderly manner.

A significant part of the 1975-1989 materials as well as the 1990-1993 collection consisted of official records of the church. Of these, the largest group were board of directors' papers, which included minutes, directives, correspondence, and papers produced by the church treasurer and the clerk of the board. Besides official church papers, materials distributed by the UFMCC national headquarters and the South Central District of the fellowship to which the local congregation belongs were also found. These materials consisted largely of serials, and reproduced copies of announcements, minutes, and guidelines that were sent to all member churches. Scattered among these official papers were numerous nonofficial items of historic importance to church and community history.

Archival Procedures

The first major decision made was to follow standard archival procedures. The collection was appraised for its informational and historical value. Official records were separated from nonofficial materials such as news clippings, community news, and public announcements concerning events within the community. Materials relating to selected church activities such as social activities, fund-raising events, worship services and liturgies, and sporting events were also separated unless they related to official administrative matters.

At this point, little weeding was done because of the cautious approach that the board of directors applied to protecting all of its records. Later, a policy was approved by the board of directors that allowed the project director to destroy personal financial and attendance records, invoices, and canceled checks of a routine nature for the period 1975 to 1989. This policy was later expanded to 1990-1993 materials.

The internal structure of the local church as well as the national fellowship and the district level administration were reviewed so that intellectual control could be determined, the collection was physically secured, and the archival material assigned to record groups was accessioned. Record groups were established which corresponded to specific time frames reflecting major church developments. Three record groups reflecting different provenance for official records dating from 1975 to 1993 were established:

> **Record Group 1 (RG 1)**
> Austin Independent Community Church Records, 1975
> **Record Group 2 (RG 2)** [1976-1989] and
> **Record Group 3 (RG 3)** [1990-1993]
> MCCA Records, [dates]
>> Board of Directors
>> Clerk of the Board

> Treasurer of the Board
> Congregation
> Miscellanea
> Office Administration
> Pastors' Offices
> Worship Coordinator, Office of
> UFMCC. Papers
> UFMCC. South Central District. Papers

In some cases, important selected primary documents such as the church's documents of incorporation, the church's charter, deeds to church property, and important letters were removed and placed temporarily in the historical records section. This decision was made because, at the time, the church was preparing for both an anniversary celebration and a visit by the Rev. Perry on a major fund-raising trip around the country to raise funds for a central headquarters building for UFMCC. The senior pastor indicated that he would like to use material in the archives to celebrate both events. Not knowing exactly what documents would be appropriate, likely documents were earmarked as suitable candidates for this planned public information and awareness campaign. When this occurred, a location statement was made to that effect and placed in the appropriate record group files. At present, plans are underway to make copies of these documents for the historical records file and to return the originals to the archival file. In the future, the plan is to retain originals in the archival collection and to place "see reference" notes in the historical records file noting the availability of the original documents within the archival record groups.

Historical Resources Collection

To meet the needs of church leaders to have a collection of historical documents and artifacts organized for accessibility and use, the second major decision was made to identify and separate from official papers as much material as possible which had unique historic value. This included such materials as clippings, brochures, bulletins and newsletters, and materials that related to activities of the church, but which were not necessarily administrative or official in nature.

The principle of provenance was maintained in two ways. The historical records collection and the provenance-arranged record groups are not physically separated from each other. They were placed side by side in a systematic shelf order, representing a holistic approach to archival records. In other words, archival record groups were housed in proximity to complementary historical records.

In addition, all historical records files that held materials relating to either MCCA or UFMCC were first identified with folder labels using the corporate names MCCA or UFMCC. These designations served to identify the documents' major points of origins. An attempt was made to file official MCCA- or UFMCC-created materials separately from externally produced materials or subject files. The historical records collection was also designed to be on-going in nature and to extend well beyond 1989. The controlled vocabulary approach should easily permit the continuous adding of material into this file.

The Historical Records File Structure

The historical records file section of the archives uses a "vertical file" system approach commonly found in libraries.[18] Nevertheless, unlike most vertical file systems, many of the subject folders created for this collection, because of their special historical content, had to be approached as manuscript or archival material and processed according to standard archival storage and descriptive cataloging methods.

Subject-Activities and Provenance Approaches

Four Categories. The basic composition of the historical resource collection consisted of materials in four categories, all of which required special considerations for subject heading access. These included:
1. General Information
2. Community Information (local and state)
3. Local Church Information (labeled with the corporate term MCCA)
4. UFMCC information (fellowship materials labeled with the corporate term UFMCC)

For the most part, subject headings suitable for general information could be found in standard published subject heading lists such as the Library of Congress, Ball, the Toronto Public Libraries, and the Sears list.[19] However, problems arose with finding subject headings that reflected local church and UFMCC activities and needs. Published subject heading lists were found to be much too general and to not always address current situations. With re-

[18] Clara L. Sitter, *The Vertical File and Its Alternatives: A Handbook* (Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited, 1992).

[19] Miriam Ogden, *Subject Headings for the Information File*, 8th ed. (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1956); Toronto Public Libraries, *Subject Headings for the Vertical File*, 2d ed., (Toronto, 1971); Library of Congress, *Library of Congress Subject Headings*, 18th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1995); *Sears List of Subject Headings*, edited by Carmen Rovira and Caroline Reyes, 15th. ed. (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1994).

luctance, it was decided that, especially for the local community, MCCA, and UFMCC church materials, unique subject headings would need to be created. Several sources were used for church and community headings including modifications of LC, suggestions from Ball (8th. ed.), and current headings found in major periodical indexes.

Subject and Name Control. Because of the church's attention to social and cultural affairs, its rather complex internal management and social structure, and the juxtaposition of UFMCC national- and district-level concerns into the local environment, providing subject access to church-based materials required that close attention be given to subject and name control. For that reason, a subject and name control card file was started which contained all subject headings, cross references, related terms, and established forms of names for individuals, organizations, and named events. This card file has been converted to book form so that it can be more widely distributed to church leaders.

Subject Headings and Church Culture. As noted, in the early stages of development of the project a decision was made to maintain a holistic relationship between the archival record groups and historical resources collection items. The first step here was to ensure that the two collections remain physically together. The second consideration was to have church materials contained in the historical resources collection reflect as much as possible the organizational pattern of the provenance-organized archival materials. This was attempted by devising a subject heading structure for the historical resources collection that reflected the culture of the church. To do this, a three-tier system of subject headings was necessary. This system consisted of the following elements:

Tier 1. Local and National Church Identifiers as Subject Headings: MCCA; UFMCC; and UFMCC. SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT. These identifiers were created to ensure that all materials relating to the church and its national and district affairs would be filed together and would indicate their points of origin. For example, materials that related to the operations and management of the local church would file under *MCCA—ADMINISTRATION*. Materials that related to the Board of Elders of the national fellowship would fall under *UFMCC—ELDERS*; and materials concerning district-level activities would similarly be filed under the corporate heading *UFMCC. SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT*, with specific subject/activity approaches following such as *UFMCC. SOUTH CENTRAL DISTRICT—CONFERENCES*.

Tier 2. Church Organization and Corporate Culture Subject Headings: The second level of subject headings was designed to reflect the corporate organizational patterns, as well as the spiritual and cultural aspect of church life. These included the following types of subject headings: *MCCA—BIOGRAPHY; MCCA—LITURGY AND SERVICES; MCCA—MINISTRIES AND SERVICE*

GROUPS; MCCA—SOCIAL ACTION; and *UFMCC—BIOGRAPHY.* The rationale for these general subject headings was that related materials can be kept together for easier access.

Tier 3. Subject Heading Used as Specific Identifiers and Modifiers: Level three subject headings are basically subheadings that have been created to reflect specific activities and/or concepts. They act as special identifiers and modifiers for distinctive types of materials such as named events. For example (*Men's Retreat*) is a modifier that was created and added to the subject heading *MCCA—PROGRAMS AND EVENTS,* becoming *MCCA—PROGRAMS AND EVENTS—(Men's Retreat).* In this way all materials related to this on-going event would be filed together. Additional modifiers were sometimes necessary to distinguish one specific event from another when they fell within the same subject heading. For example, the modifier ("*Easter Sunday Service, Covington Middle School, Austin, Texas, 1995*") was created to better identify it within the heading *MCCA—LITURGY AND SERVICES (Easter Sunday Communion Service),* making the completed heading *MCCA—LITURGY AND SERVICES (Easter Sunday Communion Service)—(Easter Sunday Service, Covington Middle School, Austin, Texas, 1995).* As shown, date and/or place modifiers for specific occurrences can be created to add needed levels of specificity. Such modifications were likewise often used in developing descriptions for portfolio notes. The creation of folders, folder notes, portfolios, and portfolio notes will be discussed in more detail below.

Uniform Name Control and Modifiers. Because subheading identifiers and modifiers are often very specific, a uniform name or title had to be established and used consistently throughout the collection. For example, the name of the current pastor, Ken Martin, has been established as Kenneth Martin and all files relating to him use Martin, Kenneth: *MCCA—PASTORS—(Martin, Kenneth).* Another illustration is the name for the service "Blessing of the Animals." The name form "Blessing of the Animals Service" has been established for this particular service and material relating to all such services will use that form of the name and file as *MCCA—LITURGY AND SERVICES—(Blessing of the Animals Services).* In this case, as in others, specific date and/or place modifiers can be added to increase levels of specificity.

Folders, Portfolios, and the Description of Contents

Focus on Manuscripts. In essence, much of the materials contained in this collection are manuscripts which come from a variety of places and persons, and include pieces acquired because of their special significance.[20] In any case, simply filing away items that relate to church and community history

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[20] Yakel, *Starting an Archives,* 5.

and affairs into folders with subject headings only, and not providing special descriptions and labeling guides would not be sufficient for local needs.

To meet the goals of the project, materials relating to a specific event or similar events had to be assembled, packaged, and described using standard bibliographic terms. The most effective means found for doing this was to create folders relating to specific topics.

Developing Folders and Portfolios

The Process. As used in this collection, the terms "folders" and "portfolios," although similar, are applied with a slight difference. A folder is the main order of organization and contains a subject heading with a general description of contents to be found in the folder, while a portfolio is considered a subunit within a folder containing specific materials with more specific descriptive terms applied to its descriptive content label.

Once content description notes have been developed, the completed folder appears as follows:

MCCA—CHRISTIAN EDUCATION AND TRAINING
(Advent Families Programs)

Assorted items. 1987-1989.
Collection of materials relating to the Advent Families program which was conducted under the direction of the Rev. Scottie Shelton from ca. 1987 through 1989. Included among the items is an Advent Wreath used in the program and copies of training materials used by both family group leaders and participants.

Content descriptive notes attached to portfolios are similar, but are more specific as to their contents as shown in the following example:

MCCA—PROGRAMS AND EVENTS
(Austin and Texas Central Railroad Excursions, March 23, 1996)

Portfolio. March 23, 1996.

Collection of a bulletin announcement and 10 colored photoprints of MCCA members and friends on the Austin and Texas Central Railroad excursion trip into the Texas Hill country near Burnet, Texas, March 23, 1996.

Portfolios are also used to denote pictorial representations such as charts, posters, and large drawings.

Uniform Titles. Subject identifiers and modifiers are used not only to denote subject content, but also as the uniform title for the folder, as for example: *MCCA—AWARDS AND STATEMENTS OF APPRECIATION.*

Systematic File Development Using Closed and Open-Entry Folders. In terms of systematic folder development, two problems arise. Sometimes an event is a one-time affair or happens during a definite period of time that permits a "closed-entry" folder. That is, the event is date- or event-specific and later occurrences of the event will not happen. A closed-entry folder can be established for such material, as given in the following example:

MCCA—BUILDINGS
(Woodward Street Property. 1990-1995)

Assorted items. 1990-1995.
Collection of materials relating to the Woodward Street property that the church occupied from 1990 to 1995. Various portfolios containing numerous items relating to this site can be found under their specific headings within this folder, e.g., Woodward Street Property. Signs and Sign Systems.

On the other hand, certain events may be on-going. This type of material requires an "open-entry" type of folder. The next example is a record for an open-ended folder that is likely to be in development indefinitely.

MCCA—CHARTERS AND PETITIONS

Assorted items. 1976. Ongoing.
Collection of photocopies of charters and petition documents issued by MCCA as well as assorted materials associated with MCCA petitions and charters. Arranged in series according to title and/or date. Originals are housed in Record Group 2 (RG 2).

Descriptions for open-entry folders are broad enough so that materials can be continually added without the need for frequent revisions of the folder record. Once a folder has been established, it is filed in the historical resources collection in simple letter-by-letter alphabetical order.

Electronic and Intellectual Access

Automation/On-Line Catalog. When this project began in 1995, it was clear that the subject method adopted mandated that a controlled vocabulary approach be followed simply because physical folders had to be filed away in a systematic, orderly fashion. Although to date over five hundred primary subject headings have been developed for this historical resources collection, the manual-operated, controlled-vocabulary subject list cannot begin to link similar subjects and concepts. It was at this point that a decision had to be made whether or not to create an automated, on-line catalog system in an affordable way so that similar records could be linked electronically.

After a management review was completed using several questions designed to highlight problem areas, a recommendation to purchase an on-line, turn-key catalog system was made to the church's board of directors. Although the board approved the request, realistically and depending on the cash-flow situation during the budget year, the church could afford an on-line catalog system costing no more than $500. This price would allow for no networking and only one computer access station.

After several affordable turn-key systems offered for sale through the library trade were reviewed and tested it was decided that a better approach would be to create an in-house system. A church member who is a database administrator with an Austin-based computer company, and who has extensive programming experience, has agreed to create an on-line system for the archives. The following example is a prototype of an archives and historical resources collection record that is being considered for the on-line system:

Call no.:
Author:
Uniform Title:
Title:
Pub. Type:
Date:
Format:
Notes:
Subject(s):

Using this form it would be simple for bibliographic information to be provided as needed, (e.g., Uniform Title: *MCCA—PROGRAMS AND EVENTS (Austin and Texas Central Railroad Excursions)* and to be searched by key words and Boolean search operators within any field.

Confidentiality of Records. Many of the items contained in this collection must be considered extremely confidential due to the social hostility directed at MCCA as an institution.[21] Therefore, the collection is restricted. Access is controlled by the archivist and the senior pastor. The most sensitive records, such as membership and financial records that clearly identify individuals, are not part of the historical records collections and are kept in the archival section permanently closed unless special reasons are given for their review.

On the other hand, the general policy is to consider certain other records such as attendance at services, meetings, and social events to be "open" records related to church activities and they are placed under less restriction. For example, photographs of members attending a social can be displayed within the church without having to acquire the permission of the individuals

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[21] The church, as a matter of policy, promises its members confidentiality in matters of church membership.

pictured. As a matter of long-standing church policy, no historical or current information identifying members by name is distributed beyond the confines of the church.

The Archival Program and Church Life

Of course, a successful archival program cannot be isolated from the total life of the church, including its administrative structure. Early in this project, a management plan was presented to and approved by the board of directors that incorporated a total information center idea. This policy statement included a records management program, the archival program, and an information center (library) concept. The management plan included a mission statement, objectives, a collection development strategy, and a statement on confidentiality. At this point, only the archival program has been implemented to any degree.

The overall plan calls for the coordinator of the archival program to report directly to the senior pastor and to serve on the Council of Ministries as a part of the church's administrative ministry. In this congregation the Council of Ministries is very active in helping to formulate and institute church policy, programs, and services. The archives' coordinator serving on the council should promote communication and help integrate the archives into the total life of the church. In addition, the coordinator is responsible for acquiring materials, planning exhibits and programs, and developing a staff of volunteers to help with day-to-day operations.

Lessons Learned

The one striking lesson of this undertaking seems to be that, although small in number, most organizations become multifarious operations because of their corporate behavioral characteristics, interests, and involvement. This, in turn, creates a need for a complex archival and historical records system.

Nevertheless, the nagging questions remain: realizing the limitations of human and economic resources available to this congregation and to most local churches, could the system have been made simpler? Will an on-line catalog system reduce the need for the detail now found in the controlled-vocabulary file approach? Is the archival system too complex to continue into the future without professional supervision? Faced with this reality, a worst-case-scenario policy has been developed which recommends that if it becomes clear to the board of directors and to the senior pastor that the church cannot support the archives and historical resources program, the collection will be given to a local university archives where it can be managed and its records protected.

For the last several decades, the gay and lesbian community as a whole has shown considerable interest in archives and historical collections, and impressive collections have developed in the United States, Canada, and western Europe. Nevertheless, because of homophobic attitudes in society some gays and lesbians remain very cautious and skeptical about turning their historical and archival materials over to others for management.[22] Although this attitude was not an overriding concern with the leadership of this particular congregation, it did appear that they would prefer to manage their own archives.

This church is growing and enjoys a well-educated and talented group of members. With proper education and explicit training and procedures manuals in place, members should be able to continue both the archival and historical records programs. However, the key ingredient to its longevity is the availability of a coordinator/administrator who understands archival and information system management and who is supported by an informed board of directors and pastor.

Local churches, being rich sources of community history, often serve as reflectors of social and cultural movements and concerns. It is only through systematic attention to their records that an important aspect of community culture will survive.

[22] Polly Thistlethwaite, ''The Lesbian and Gay Past: An Interpretive Battleground.'' *Gay Community News* [Boston, Mass.] 20 (Winter 1995): 10–12.