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## Rethinking Reference Resources: Redesigning a Roman Catholic Reading Room

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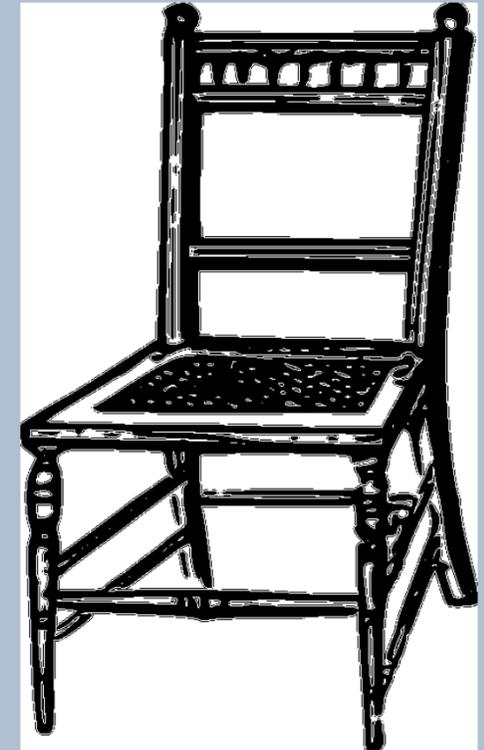
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# Rethinking Reference Resources:

Redesigning a Reading Room

*^Roman Catholic*

Henry Handley  
they/them and he/him  
University of Dayton



# Marian Library

Founded in 1943, historically focused  
on collecting,  
serving Catholics with "sound  
devotion" to the Virgin Mary

(Right: theology institute held by the  
Marian Library, 1966)



# Today

- More than incidentally Catholic
- Part of a 90%+ white libraries unit
- Rare and "medium rare" books; archives, art, realia
- Source of institutional and religious identity
- In last 10 years, increased instruction, research fellowships, reevaluating collections (when there's time)  
and...
- I work there - white, queer, trans and definitely not Catholic

# The Space



One of three Marian Library public spaces (the other two are galleries)  
Not part of a 2019 renovation  
Not designed as a special collections reading room  
(Photo of entrance with divider shelf courtesy Kayla Harris)

# A Divide

## REFERENCE COLLECTION

- Specialized Catholic theology
- Majority in Latin, French, German
- Occasionally duplicated elsewhere in the libraries
- Often outdated

## MOST FREQUENT USERS

- Not necessarily Catholic
- Majority English-speaking
- Undergraduate classes in humanities working with archives, rare books, realia
- Research fellows (broad humanities base)

# Statements vs. spaces

- What does a special collections reading room look like?
  - Why?
- What does a special collections reference collection have?
  - For whom?

"Whiteness is produced as host, as that which is already in place or at home. To be welcomed is to be positioned as the one who is not at home." - Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included* (43)

# Radical Welcome

Defined in *Radical Welcome* by Stephanie Spellers, an Episcopal priest:

"Radical welcome is a fundamental spiritual practice, one that combines the universal Christian ministry of welcome and hospitality with a clear awareness of power and patterns of inclusion and exclusion." (11)

- Emphasis on connecting, becoming
- Speaking to individual spirituality, institutional rhetoric in the space

# Process

## Move out/transfer:

New issues of periodicals ("walked off" with faculty/were subsequently inaccessible)  
Seldom-used series and monographs  
Materials that needed further review

## Review for deselection:

Duplicates (ML or main academic collection)  
Damaged volumes  
Outdated, out of scope

# Phases

```
graph TD; Root[Phases] --- L1[Phase 1 (2021)  
Assessment,  
transfer/  
deselection,  
making room]; Root --- L2[Phase 2 (2021-2022)  
New art,  
circulating  
books on  
display]; Root --- L3[Phase 3 (2023-)  
Removal of  
divider shelf,  
more signage,  
reference desk];
```

## Phase 1 (2021)

Assessment,  
transfer/  
deselection,  
making room

## Phase 2 (2021-2022)

New art,  
circulating  
books on  
display

## Phase 3 (2023-)

Removal of  
divider shelf,  
more signage,  
reference desk

# Results

- Iterative, collaborative process with library departments, faculty
- Increased capacity for class visits like the one at right (photo by Ann Zlotnik for the Marian Library Newsletter)



# Reference, Renewed

Recently added books support student research assignments

Transfer and deselection are clearing the way for a staff desk

But... transfer and deselection have added to backlog, and in part reduced capacity

# Conclusions

## ⚙️ Special collections are living collections

Deselection is a part of life (and growth)

## ⚙️ Visible collections influence spaces and visitors

Working with institutional identity can still mean iterative progress

# References

- 🔍 Ahmed, Sara. *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012.
- 🔍 Spellers, Stephanie. *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, the Other, and the Spirit of Transformation*. Church Publishing, 2006.

Thanks again to Kayla Harris, Ann Zlotnik, and the Wayfinders students!

# Thank you!

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