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Celebrating Catholic Collections

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The University of Dayton is celebrating the anniversaries of the U.S. Catholic Special Collection and the Marian Library — unique repositories of Catholic knowledge and learning located in the University's Roesch Library.

"These are two gems — two of the most distinctive aspects of our campus — so important to the Catholic, Marianist identity of the University of Dayton and our place as a leader in Catholic scholarship and research," said Joseph Saliba, University of Dayton provost.

Dean of Libraries Kathleen Webb said the University will commemorate the 10th anniversary of the U.S. Catholic Special Collection and the 65th anniversary of the Marian Library with a May 20 private event recognizing major donors.

The U.S. Catholic Collection contains more than 30,000 items that trace the rich history of Catholicism in the United States, according to Nicoletta Hary, collection curator and a driving force behind its development and growth.

The collection was established to support the University's doctoral program in the American Catholic experience at a time when religious orders were shrinking. Hary said the library initiated the collection by sending letters to hundreds of U.S. women's and men's religious orders.

"We were absolutely swamped and surprised at the success of the request," she said. "Religious orders — especially of women — were reducing or closing their libraries and they were glad to entrust their books to a Catholic university."

The sisters, priests and brothers have sent boxes and boxes of current as well as pre-Vatican II textbooks from Catholic schools, she said. The collection includes historical and doctrinal works, church documents and objects used during Mass as well as during personal prayer and devotion.

What Hary called the "most precious of the non-book materials" are the relics — tiny bits of saints' bones and fabric from their clothing, often displayed in precious devotional cases. "Relics are an important part of Catholic heritage. They're not in the collection for veneration, as devotional items, but as symbols and examples of our heritage," she said.

As Catholic schools continue to close all around the country, Hary said orders are sending boxes of contributions to the collection.

Current publications are also coming in. Hary said the St. Anthony Messenger Press donates a copy of every book, video and other media it produces.

While the U.S. Catholic Collection focuses on the Catholic church in America, the Marian Library gathers books, rosaries, statues — even postage stamps and wine labels — into its expansive collection of all things related to Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ.

According to the Rev. Johann Roten, S.M., director of the International Marian Research Institute/Marian Library, the collection draws researchers from throughout the U.S. and the world. The library houses the largest and most comprehensive collection of printed materials on Mary in the world as well as extensive holdings of art and devotional items.

The library was founded in 1943 by the Society of Mary at the University of Dayton and now contains more than 100,000 books and pamphlets in more than 50 languages, ranging from the oldest, a collection of sermons printed in 1473, to new publications. The collection includes more than 63,000 clippings from newspapers and magazines and more than 100,000 cards and prints depicting Mary in various artistic forms.

Especially dear to Roten is the library's collection of nearly 2,000 Nativity scenes, also called crèches, from around the world. A sample of the crèches is on display year-round, but at Christmas, the library loans scores of the scenes to parishes and museums around the country.
Roten said library holdings reflect changing trends in devotion to Mary.

"We are seeing more presence, more acceptance and more references to Marian devotion in recent years, especially from a multicultural and diversity point of view," he said. "We are seeing a stronger Marian dimension coming from the Indian subcontinent, Asia and Africa.

Roten said recent scholarship has looked at the social role of Mary. "She's seen as a figurehead of social justice, especially in Latin America and Asia," he said.

The U.S. Catholic Special Collection is open to the public 2 to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. Materials from the collection can be checked out from the circulation desk during library hours. For more information, visit the related link.

The Marian Library is located on the seventh floor of Roesch Library. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday and evenings and weekends by appointment by calling 937-229-4214. Visit the related link.

For more information, contact Cilla Shindell, director of media relations, at 937-229-3257 or shindell@udayton.edu.