

THE ARCHIVES OF THE EPISCOPAL CHURCH

Proposal for a Mission Research and Archives Center for The Episcopal Church

The Bricks and Mortar of Our History

Since its earliest years of formation in the United States in 1789, The Episcopal Church has struggled to become a fully inclusive worship community that unifies God's people for the great commission to bring good news to all Creation. Throughout their history, Episcopalians have turned to this commission first in America and then abroad to create a foundation of spirituality, human fulfillment, and openness to the gifts of others in institutions and practices found around the globe in community churches, schools, hospitals, relief centers, housing, places of comfort and safety, and the unguarded desire to aid others for the sake of humanity.

A compelling history of engagement at home and in diverse corners of the world binds Episcopalians to a legacy they can enthusiastically point to as a source of inspiration and continuing commitment to a lively and "affirming tradition."¹ This history and these traditions survive and are passed on as accumulated memory in the archival evidence and modern scriptures of the encoded word. The Church's collective wisdom is a renewable resource, which is more relevant with each fresh retelling. The Archives of the Episcopal Church is a cornerstone of that renewable resource, bringing The Episcopal Church's practice of reconciliation and healing to a truthful reexamination with each new or innovative ministry.

The history of The Episcopal Church exists and is preserved in a myriad of recorded formats from fragile papers to material culture in liturgical artifacts, from films and photographs taken in missionary outposts to multi-gigabyte electronic media. Housing and caring for what is truly irreplaceable and what is valuable beyond measure require a facility that is state of the art, accessible to those who want to use our resources, inviting to those who seek greater understanding of our faith community, and capable of preserving the physical evidence of our Episcopal identity.

To achieve these goals, the Church must raise funds to acquire land, to design and to erect a building, and to equip that building to meet our needs for preservation, technology, and education as we anticipate the next several decades. It is not enough to raise funds – we must draw upon gifts that renew themselves well into the future like the history and new stories they make possible. The Church's vision is to establish a research and archives center that will make a long term, material contribution to the historic work of The Episcopal Church. By drawing on the vitality of the surrounding urban setting and a vibrant parish life, the Archives can become a self-sustaining national and international center for welcoming study, conversation, and new thinking.

The Archives of The Episcopal Church currently holds over 18,000 cubic feet of documents, books, audio and visual records and numerous collections documenting Church and society in the US, Central and South America, and parts of Africa and Asia. Much of the Church's historical resources are stored in conditions that are unsatisfactory and inaccessible. These collections and the programs to support them will require a modern facility of about 50,000 square feet of space. The Archives maintains every format of record-- from seventeenth century manuscripts to twenty-first century electronic records – all of which require controlled environments if they are to last into the next centuries. As the Church and the broader society continue to move rapidly toward a totally

¹ The Episcopal Church Foundation. *The Zacchaeus Project: Discerning Episcopal Identity at the Dawn of the New Millennium*. June 1999. pp 18-20.

electronic age of record keeping, storage, and delivery, the Archives will also require space and infrastructure that can adequately and properly care for the various non-paper media that are being collected. Though electronic media often requires less physical space to house them, the technology required to store, migrate, retrieve, and analyze such records demands a different configuration of space and technology.

Many individuals and institutions – both inside the Church and in the public sphere – have a keen interest in studying archival records for educational, public policy, family history, social analysis, and a variety of personal pursuits that illumine the work of the present and future with the light of the past. Preserving the materials needed for such ongoing research is a vital function of the Archives. At the same time responding to an ever increasing demand for these materials dictates that the physical housing of the irreplaceable archives be welcoming, accessible, and secure. Rather than offering Spartan quarters to those visitors who would use the area, or to those who would prepare recorded media for access and preservation, the Church envisions a center for bringing its archival and information resources within the reach of members and visitors alike, a center with an active educational component and a physical setting commensurate with its evolving mission.

Mission is History-in-the-Making, Everyday in Our Lives and the Lives of Others

The impact Christianity has made in the world is imbedded in our ability to remember and to tell the unique story of God being discovered at work in the lives of real people living in real historical and social contexts. From the primordial call of Abraham to create covenant with God, to the experience of Jesus as Messiah, to the present work of the Church, we are at our best as storytellers. The Archives of the Episcopal Church is more than the bricks and mortar of accumulated memory, though it is that. It is where our story is honored and where storytellers go to remember and to reclaim the energy of God still being discovered at work in the lives of people. As The Episcopal Church, in its dioceses and world-wide mission work, discerns its unfolding purpose, the voices of continuity and change contribute to the creation of a comprehensive archive.

The Episcopal Archives Strategy Committee and the Board of Archives have identified the requirements for ensuring that the Church's Archives will be a permanent repository for institutional memory, reconciliation, education for mission and ministry, and engagement with the world. The Mission Research and Archives Center will be designed to be a creative forum for all Episcopalians to gather, contemplate the future, and be conscious of the living traditions that create Anglican identity in this culture and place.

To make all this happen the Church proposes a new home for the Archives and a challenge to the wider Church. Our goal is exciting: to establish a Mission Research and Archives Center that will serve the Church as a permanent asset and a model of sustainability. The Church Archives Project will preserve our spiritual and cultural assets *and* ensure the Archives' ability to serve the institutional Church well into the future. To accomplish these goals, the Church must raise a minimum of \$40 million in a variety of major gifts, Church-wide donations, and planned giving.