

Collection stewardship constrained by resources: The management of religious archives in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal region

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A survey using questionnaires, observation and interviews was conducted in 2011 to ascertain the collection stewardship strategies of archival repositories with religious archives in Pietermaritzburg. The study concluded that there was a need to establish a religious archives group in order for the voice of ecclesiastical archives to resonate across South Africa. Through this group, it is hoped that there will be greater coordination and networking amongst the archival repositories. The help of associations such as the South African Society of Archivists, the Oral History Association of South Africa and the South African Preservation Group could greatly assist in fostering best practices in archival management. To champion this worthwhile cause, it would be ideal to come up with an Open Day on religious archives to serve as an advocacy platform. These recommendations are made against a backdrop of the poor state of religious archives in Pietermaritzburg, resulting from acute underfunding and which threatens the survival of this record in the long term.

Introduction

KwaZulu-Natal's religious landscape

The province of KwaZulu-Natal is home to approximately 11 million people, which is about 21.0% of South Africa's total population (Statistics South Africa [StasSA] 2011). According to the 2001 StatsSA census, between 49.5% and 74.8% of people in KwaZulu-Natal are Christians (Symington 2005:109). The transplanting of Christianity in South Africa has a long chequered history as it developed in phases, of which some of the most important were the arrival of the Dutch colonists in 1652 and that of the British settlers in 1820. Kruger, Lubbe and Steyn (2004:12) observed that the entry of Christianity into South Africa was, from the very beginning, compromised by a tight association with European colonialist expansion.

Etherington (1989:275) noted that during the second half of the 19th century, Natal, as it was known then, became one of the most heavily evangelised regions of the globe. About 70 Protestant and 40 Catholic mission stations were established in Natal, most of them south of the Tugela River. These missionary stations represented several mission societies from diverse denominational origins, such as the American Congregationalists, Scottish Presbyterians, English Methodists, French and German Catholics and Lutherans from Saxony, Prussia and Scandinavia. According to Etherington (1989), the rise of the Zulu monarchy provoked great interest in Christian missionary societies in Europe and America. These mission stations represented a conglomeration of interests, with some viewing them as centres of religion, health, education, trade and contact with the colonial government (Haan 2010:136).

It is this rich ecclesiastical history that informs the foundation of archival resources within this province. Hedenskog (1987:1) pointed out that the archives of mission societies and churches have information which is important from an historical, ethnological, sociological and theological point of view. Chartres (2010) noted that much of our national heritage is recorded in the archives of our religious institutions and communities and other related bodies. Suelflow (1965:242) echoed similar sentiments and stated that denominational archival repositories have collections that are intensely significant, invaluable and irreplaceable – even though somewhat scattered, disorganised, inaccessible and inefficiently maintained.

The Church of England (2009) further noted that the Church also has theological reasons for managing its records as testimony to its various activities as part of its continuing witness to Christians, those of other faiths and those of none. It is hence of great importance to ensure that this archival collection is maintained under the best possible environmental conditions for posterity purposes. As noted by Schuster (1982), it is our job as archivists actively to collect, preserve and

make available for use documents that create a true picture of the past. In addition, as pointed out by Lambert (1975), not only should this past be viewed from an historiographical perspective but it should also reflect the development of religious practices and theological tendencies.

Definition of terms

Archives are documentary materials created, received, used and kept by a person, family, organisation, government or other public or private entity in the conduct of their daily work and life and preserved because they contain enduring value as evidence of and information about activities and events (Millar 2010:260). Archives can be written on paper, parchment or other materials, or exist in the form of photographs, computer discs and films, videos, tape recordings, CDs or in other audio-visual or electronic form. Seton and Smalley (2003) rightly pointed out that if these records are lacking, the story that becomes our history will be incomplete and inaccurate. We, as Christians, should understand the need for archives because our faith specifically engages us with the long history of God's interaction with the world.

Regardless of type, as noted by Suelflow (1980:7), most religious archives collect such records as minutes, correspondence, reports of their various entities, financial ledgers and reports, audit reports, records of appeals and adjudication, interoffice memos, charitable records, appointment books, registers, charters, deeds, articles of incorporation, agreements and statistical reports. Private archives are those originating from groups, associations, businesses, political parties and are viewed as private because they are created, received and maintained by non-governmental organisations, families or individuals relating to their private and public affairs (International Records Management Trust [IRMT] 1999). Religious archives are thus private archives as they are one of such genre of records belonging to groups or associations such as missions and denominational institutions.

Genesis, scope and methodology of the project

The primary aim of this survey was an attempt to assess the current administrative practices of religious archives in Pietermaritzburg, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. It was also the project's mandate to identify the collecting institutions within Pietermaritzburg, with the possible aim of establishing an outline or directory of religious archival holdings within Pietermaritzburg (to be published). The motivation for this project was thus driven by the need for archival mapping in order to establish greater coordination and networking in the management of this unique resource.

The long-term objective, funds permitting that is, is to promote the use of this primary material through outreach activities, such as holding an Open Day on religious archives biennially. To assist in this advocacy cause, it will be worthwhile to consider the establishment of a church archives

committee or a religious archives group (similar to the one in the United Kingdom), to serve as an informal network of archivists, manuscript librarians and others with an interest in the collection, management and use of archives related to the various faith communities in Pietermaritzburg. It is also hoped that this survey will transcend into a provincial and national project in order for the voice of ecclesiastical archives to resonate across South Africa.

Owing to time and resource constraints (10 months in all), the scope of the survey was limited to 10 archival repositories within Pietermaritzburg and the contact details were obtained largely through personal email communication with an authority in Church history, Professor Denis¹ (2011) in the School of Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal. To supplement and confirm the entries, use was also made of Stilwell's (1999) *Directory of South African resource centres* and the National Archives and Records Service of South Africa's (NARS) (2005) *Directory of archival repositories*. A questionnaire, observation and interview schedules were the primary means of data collection and these survey instruments are available from the researcher upon request. This research approach was adopted because of the need to represent a plurality of interests, voices and perspectives. As noted by Krivokapic-Skoko and O'Neill (2011), mixed methods research has the potential to provide new insights into, and understanding of, phenomena being investigated.

The questionnaire covered 11 main areas: institutional data and holdings, preservation policies, accommodation, temperature and humidity, pest management, storage and handling, disaster preparedness and planning, fire detection and suppression, security, information technology and access. The bulk of the self-administered questionnaires were sent by post with the rest being hand delivered. A list of the archival institutions that were surveyed can be found in Online Appendix 1.

Research findings

In total, 10 questionnaires were sent and 9 completed questionnaires were returned, which represented a 90% response rate. The data that are presented in this article are not associated with any particular archival institution but are representative of all participating institutions. To encourage full and frank participation, respondents were promised in the covering letter that their institutional data would not be individually identifiable (see Online Appendix 2). The data presented in this article were obtained from questionnaires, interviews and direct observation. The results are organised according to the themes of the research issues that were raised in the previous section.

1. Philippe Denis is professor of History of Christianity at the School of Religion and Theology, University of KwaZulu-Natal. He has lectured at the University of KwaZulu-Natal since 1993 and is a visiting professor at the History Department of the University of Louvain since 2001. He has authored, co-authored or edited 20 books and published more than 100 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. His main areas of research are the history of the Reformation, the history of Christianity in southern Africa, the history of HIV and AIDS in Africa, oral history methodology and memory work. An important part of his time is dedicated to the Sinomlando Centre for Oral History and Memory Work in Africa, a research and community-based project he established in the mid-1990s at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Institutional data and holdings

This background information on the profile of the institution was essential because understanding the nature of preservation activities hinges upon knowing the location of the archival repository, the magnitude of the holdings, the types of record media and their age, which is intrinsically linked to the expected life span of each document storage medium (Ngulube 2003). Of responses received, 70.0% of the surveyed institutions have generated and retained some form of records over 20 years old. Of these, 68.0% continue to hold some or all of these archives within the organisation, whilst others have deposited their archival collections entirely with another organisation. Table 1 presents the type of recording media reported by respondents. Of interest as well is the fact that the bulk of this collection, 96.1%, is in paper format, with photographs at 1.6% and digital media (magnetic and video tapes etc.) accounting for about 1.2% and 1.1% of the institutions' holdings, respectively. Current holdings of digital media were low and the majority of archival institutions acknowledged that they were encountering challenges in the management of this newer media.

Respondents were also asked about the date ranges of holdings because paper records, which constituted the dominant type of documentary media in these repositories, decay over time through natural aging, subject to various environmental conditions. The majority of the respondents held records from the 19th century to the present.

Preservation policies

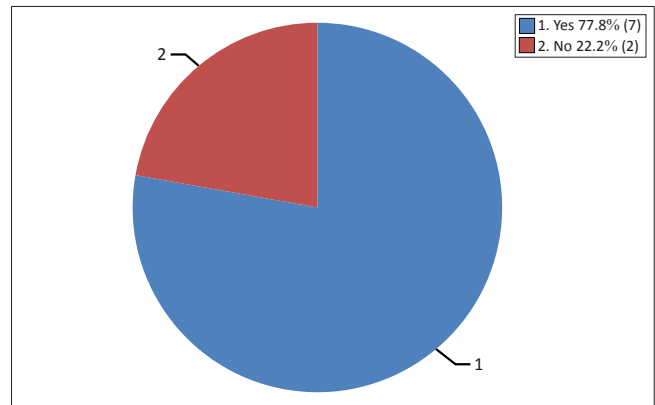
Ngulube (2003) remarked that the formulation of preservation policies is an essential step in the preservation of records and archives. A preservation policy reminds the formulators of the constraints they must all accept if important records are to be saved for present and future generations. Ngulube (2003) further noted that a written preservation policy provides a framework, a set of parameters, within which an archive can operate. The policy serves to clarify objectives and facilitates planning and coordination of activities. It is a useful tool of guiding staff on what is to be done and why. It is also essential for setting priorities and making decisions. Swartzburg (1995:30) pertinently noted that if a mission statement does not exist, planning for preservation becomes very difficult if not impossible.

Ngulube (2005:160) echoed similar sentiments and stated that the lack of a mission statement means that preservation activities are characterised by a hit and miss approach. Ngulube (2005) further remarked that an institution with a clear mission statement is likely to have a vision for dealing with various aspects of preservation including environmental management. Seton and Smalley (2003) also espoused the view that:

Establishing an archival program requires a long-term commitment on the part of the leaders of an organization. Whether the archives are housed within the organization or hosted elsewhere, there must be an on-going commitment to provide for staff, space, and financial support. Ideally, this commitment should be formalized in a Statement of Goals that serves as a written reminder of why the archival program has been established and what it hopes to achieve. (p. 7)

TABLE 1: Types of records held in repositories with religious archivalia in Pietermaritzburg.

Types of records	Average percentage of the total holdings
Paper	96.1
Photographs	1.6
Magnetic tapes	1.2
Video tapes	1.1



Source: Author's own data

FIGURE 1: Number of surveyed religious archival institutions in Pietermaritzburg with a mission statement.

Respondents were therefore asked if they had mission statements for their archival repositories. From the responses received, two (22.2%) did not have a mission statement, whilst seven (77.8%) did, as shown in Figure 1.

A content analysis of their mission statements revealed that the mandate differed from institution to institution, which largely shaped their objectives and acquisition efforts. However, three (33.3%) stated that their mandate was to prepare men and women for ministry and four (44.4%) stated that their mission statement was about their organisation and centred mostly on why they were in existence. One respondent noted, for instance, that their mission was to collect and preserve documents, books, journals, diaries, photographs, audio-visual materials, textiles, vestments², sacramentals and museum items pertaining to their organisation, with particular reference to their personnel, parishes, missions, schools and formation houses in KwaZulu-Natal. Out of the seven institutions (77.8%) who had mission statements, five (55.6%) specifically mentioned preservation, whilst this was absent in the other two (22.2%) because they were depositing their records with other collecting repositories.

Intimately associated with the foregoing was the issue of conservation laboratories, as the treatment and restoration of materials depends on the existence of preservation facilities. Liebenberg-Barkhuizen and Koopman (2012) further noted that paper conservation is a delicate art which involves the restoration, preservation and long-term conservation of valuable documents to ensure their continued existence and to prevent further degradation. Five (55.6%) respondents had in-house conservation facilities, whilst four (44.4%) did not. Considering that not only is conservation a specialist area,

²One archival repository mentioned that they had a museum in the city where they stored vestments worn by their priests, bishops et cetera and this collection drive deserves commendation considering that this is an important part of the congregation's religious history.

but also expensive in terms of infrastructure, visits to four of the institutions for observation confirmed that this aspect was undeveloped, something which points to critical funding issues. Only one (11.1%) institution had a fully fledged conservation studio manned by an expert, where items are de-acidified and repaired et cetera.

Accommodation

Ritzenthaler (1993) pointed out that the highest preservation priority of every archival institution should be to provide environmentally controlled quarters for the storage and use of its holdings. Millar (2010) echoed similar sentiments and noted that protecting archives from harm and ensuring they are available for use for as long as possible are essential archival responsibilities. Indeed, without an adequate environmental defence, all other efforts may be irrelevant. From the responses received, only two (22.2%) of the archival institutions had custom-built accommodation, with four (44.4%) having had their facilities adapted to house their collections. Three (33.3%) did not have dedicated storage and one of these three was, however, transferring its material to collecting institutions. Commenting on the issue of facilities, one respondent noted that, 'We do not have a dedicated building for our archival material, but know that there is a collection institution geared for storing these.' One (11.1%) institution acknowledged that whilst it did not have dedicated storage per se, it at least had centralised air-conditioning for heating and cooling that uniformly affected books, audio-visual and archival material. On the whole, however, the reality is that most religious archives are generally held in far from ideal accommodation. This status quo could be attributed to an acute shortage of resources in terms of funding, as money to commission and regularly maintain air conditioning or fire suppression systems was unavailable. The oldest archival repository was built in 1900, whilst the newest was constructed in 2010.

Brick and concrete were the materials mostly used for the structure of the buildings. Concrete was also used for floors in the stack areas. Six (66.7%) respondents out of nine reported that the buildings housing archival materials were subject to regular technical maintenance. Respondents were asked to state the proximity of the buildings to environments that pose preservation problems. Two archival institutions reported that they were located near an industrial area; hence, their collections were exposed to air pollution, whilst two archival institutions were close to a river and one close to a dam. In addition, two archival institutions had water pipes close to the records stacks.

Temperature and humidity

Temperature (the level of heat or cold in a substance or in the surrounding environment) and relative humidity (the amount of water vapour in the air) can significantly affect the life span of archival materials (Millar 2010). It is generally believed that every increase in temperature of 5 °C doubles the reaction rate of media. Similarly, the higher the humidity,

the greater is the risk to archives. The greatest danger is not the levels of temperature and humidity but excessive fluctuations. As the levels rise and fall, materials expand, shrink and expand again. The implication is that temperature and relative humidity need to be monitored regularly because inappropriate levels of either will contribute significantly to the deterioration of materials.

From the responses received, five (55.6%) out of nine archival institutions had a heating, ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) system, whilst four (44.4%) were without. The age of each HVAC system is shown in Table 2. One archival institution reported that its HVAC system was more than 10 years old, whilst three said that it was between 4 and 10 years old. The HVAC system was maintained annually by four institutions. Two respondents reported that the system was never maintained. This state of affairs was not surprising considering that complete climate control provided by HVAC systems are costly and difficult to install, expensive to operate and maintain. As noted by Ngulube (2005:162), the energy resources to keep an air-conditioning system running are prohibitive for most sub-Saharan Africa.

Whilst some authorities recommend passive climate control through the design of buildings that have 'natural' methods of air-conditioning in order to reduce the installation, energy and maintenance costs, this however remains a pipe dream in view of the prohibitive costs. In any case, the budget allocated for archival activities is meagre if not non-existent and, commenting on the NARS, Ngoepe (2011:2) noted that the national repository is so dreadfully under-resourced and politically hamstrung that it can barely perform the simplest of its mandated duties. Marks (2012) also commented that it is noteworthy that in the budget debate in the South African Parliament earlier this year, the minister of arts and culture did not even mention the national archives.

Save for exceptional cases, the non-prioritisation of archives, be they public or private is great cause for concern. A recently influential variable has been the decline in the global economy, leading to belt tightening as core values are re-examined to identify the most mission-critical needs as well as those that must be discontinued or scaled down (Dooley & Luce 2010). Mnjama (2007:119) could not have overstated matters when he pointed out that many archives programmes fail as a result of inadequate funding. Therefore any institution contemplating establishing an archives service must be prepared to provide the necessary funding to support the programme. Funds will be needed

TABLE 2: Age of heating, ventilation and air-conditioning systems in repositories with religious archivalia in Pietermaritzburg.

Age or status	Frequency	Percentage
Without	3	33.3
1–3 years	1	11.1
4–10 years	3	33.3
Less than 1 year	1	11.1
More than 10 years	1	11.1
Total	9	100.0

for purchase of specialised storage equipment, restoration facilities, maintenance costs, archival boxes, insurance, acid-free papers et cetera.

Four (44.4%) out of seven archives repositories that had records in their custody, monitored temperature levels in their repositories constantly. Four (44.4%) reportedly used thermometers to measure temperature. Two (22.2%) archival institutions monitored relative humidity (RH) levels in their repositories constantly, whilst seven (77.8%) did not. Two (22.2%) institutions had controlled RH of between 35.0% and 60.0% in areas where records and archives were stored. Only one (11.1%) of these two institutions used humidity indicator strips and psychrometers (wet and bulb thermometers) to check humidity levels. Use of humicaptors to absorb the water vapour in the repository was reported by one institution and direct observation at this institution confirmed this.

Five (55.6%) of the surveyed archival institutions used environmental monitoring devices in their repositories, whilst four (44.4%) did not. The five (55.6%) using monitoring units reported that they were all functioning well. To highlight the importance of environmental control, the South African Preservation and Conservation Group (SAPCON) and Library Association of South Africa awareness campaign at the COP17 conference in Durban in 2011 stated that they had made progress in their aim of getting the message out that climate change is also having an impact on our research resources (Somers 2012:15).

Pest management

Mould, pests and rodents can all damage archives. They are enticed into repositories by the high RH, high temperatures, the absence of light and availability of food, particularly the nutrients found in paper, glues, leathers and adhesives. Only one (11.1%) archival institution experienced vermin infestation in the building. Seven (77.8%) respondents reported that they carried out routine fogging of their repositories, whilst two (22.2%) did not. The frequency of extermination of pests ranged from once to twice a year.

Storage and handling

Proper storage and handling of records and archival materials is a prerequisite in an archival repository. The majority of the surveyed institutions used adjustable metal shelving. The main advantages of metal shelves are that they are adjustable to fit various sizes of archival objects, that they are durable and non-combustible. Two institutions were using wooden shelves and the sagging noticed during visits confirmed the unreliability of wood as shelving material.

General handling raises serious preservation issues. Much of the damage that records and archives sustain is the result of inadequate handling. Ngulube (2003) noted that users and staff need to be trained and given guidelines on the handling of archival materials.

Eight (88.9%) of archival institutions were using boxing as the preferred preservation option as evidenced by the use of acid-free boxes, as is shown in Figure 2. This creation of a microenvironment has been the best solution to compensate for the poorly designed structures presently housing the archival material as most repositories are not purpose-built. Millar (2010) rightly noted that archival quality envelopes, folders and boxes provide a stable microenvironment, reducing the spread of acid and mitigating the effects of fluctuating temperature and RH.

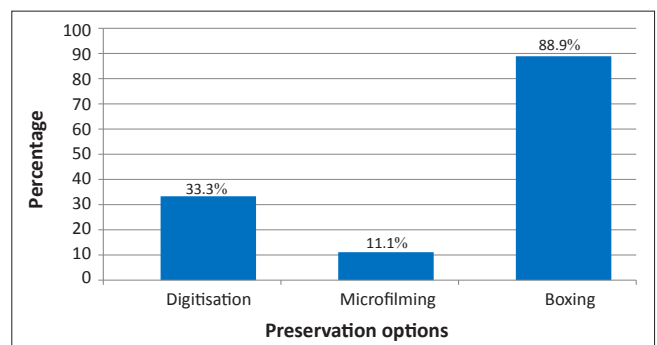
Shortage of space was a serious concern expressed by four (44.4%) respondents. Five (55.6%) of the surveyed archival repositories had adequate space for shelving and storage of records and archives. Two (22.2%) archival institutions carried out annual stocktaking of their archival holdings.

Disaster preparedness and planning

Disaster preparedness and security of collections, be it in libraries or archives, both public and private, has never been prioritised. Ngulube (2005) and Ngulube and Magazi (2006) observed that many libraries and archives within east and southern Africa have neither a disaster preparedness nor security plan in place. In fact, too many librarians and archivists in the region have not even given serious thought or effort to the development of either of these plans. Disasters can be natural or man-made and there is consensus that a good plan makes an incident much easier to manage and helps individuals to make decisions quickly and assess the situations effectively and efficiently. Plans minimise risk, maximise the speed of recovery and help the organisation get back to business quickly (Mathews 2009).

Lyall (1995) defined the disaster preparedness plan as a document which describes the procedures devised to prevent and prepare for disasters, as well as those proposed to respond to and recover from disasters when they occur. Its four major components are:

- prevention
- preparedness
- response
- recovery.



Source: Author's own data

Please note that the percentage values of the preservation options do not add up to 100% because there were multiple responses for each category.

FIGURE 2: Current preservation options for storage of archival material in religious repositories in Pietermaritzburg.

Three (33.3%) archival institutions had written disaster preparedness plans and six (66.7%) did not. Respondents were asked to choose from a list the aspects covered by their plans. Visits to three institutions on observation mission and interviewing confirmed that what they actually had was an emergency plan pasted on the wall indicating exit routes within the building for people and not for their collections. The aspects covered by the plans are summarised in Table 3 and the figures confirm this observation.

Three (33.3%) archival institutions reported that their disaster preparedness and recovery plans were last reviewed in 2011. Three (33.3%) archival repositories had a disaster planning team in place, whilst six (66.7%) did not. Three (33.3%) institutions had a chain of command to deal with a disaster. One (11.1%) institution reported that they had experienced a disaster, in that on one occasion their records had been destroyed by arson-induced fire. Interviews with the archivist and observation confirmed that they had since installed fire detectors and alarms as a precautionary measure.

Fire detection and suppression

Millar (2010) noted that fire has a devastating effect on archives, not just because of the all-consuming losses brought by the fire itself but also because of the damage caused by the water or chemicals used to extinguish the flames. With regards to fire protection, eight of the archival institutions (88.9%) had fire extinguishers, and five (55.6%) reported that they had fire detection systems in their repositories. Multipurpose fire extinguishers, with a percentage of 66.7%, were by far the most used in the archival repositories in Pietermaritzburg, as shown in Figure 3. One respondent used electrical and Halon extinguishers. The extinguishers were inspected annually in all of the surveyed repositories.

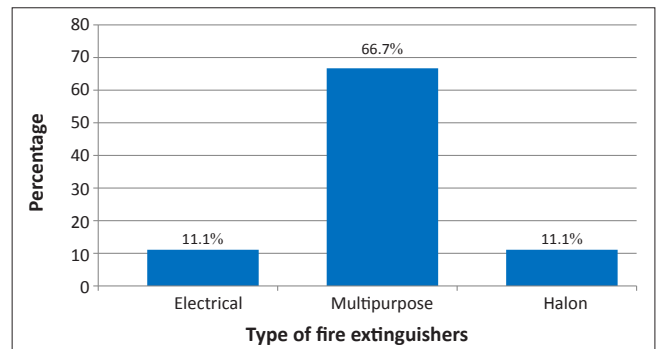
Six (66.7%) of the archival institutions reported that staff had been trained to use fire extinguishers and three (33.3%) had not. The training was conducted by the local fire department in two institutions and for the other four it was contracted to a private company. Two (22.2%) of the archival institutions had a sprinkler system, namely a wet-pipe system, in the building and seven (77.8%) did not. Four (44.4%) archival institutions did not have automatic fire detection systems, whilst five (55.6%) did.

Security

Five (55.6%) of the institutions' archives were not protected by alarm systems, compared to four (44.4%) who had such protection. Five (55.6%) did not employ security personnel round the clock, whilst four (44.4%) did. Four (44.4%) institutions also had closed-circuit television cameras (CCTV). Four (44.4%) archival institutions reported the existence of an intruder alarm system in their repositories, whilst five (55.6%) did not. Six (66.7%) of the archival institutions had lockers for users to place their bags in upon entering the archival institution, although this was difficult to enforce because they were not custom-built to fit the

TABLE 3: Aspects covered by the disaster preparedness plans of religious repositories in Pietermaritzburg.

Safe evacuation of people	List emergency supplies	Deals with records	Deals with building
3 (33.3%)	3 (33.3%)	4 (44.4%)	3 (33.3%)



Source: Author's own data

FIGURE 3: Type of fire extinguishers used in religious repositories in Pietermaritzburg.

layout of the buildings. This equally applied to the search room supervision for users of archive material, because of the lack of a designated search room in five (55.6%) of the archival institutions.

A survey carried out on university libraries in Africa by Mnjama (2007) similarly found that supervision of users was a major concern to manuscript curators. The need for effective supervision of users cannot be overstated considering that archival material is rare, unique and irreplaceable. In addition, it is generally known that most thefts from archives take place during consultation, which makes it mandatory for the supervisor to have a clear view of all researchers in the room. Seton and Smalley (2003) correctly suggested that if supervision is not possible, then the researcher should only be issued with one volume or file at a time, which should be examined on return.

Information technology and access

Information communication technologies (ICTs) have had a tremendous impact on the storage and retrieval of information. Owing to improved technology, archival institutions can make their databases searchable online to remote users, thereby facilitating access. On the use of finding aids, Geary (1983:180) noted that not only do they establish bibliographic control over the entire collection, but they also facilitate use of the materials. Castells (2001) rightly pointed out that with instantaneous global communications, we are no longer dependent on human contact in order to achieve human intercourse. This network society presents a particular dilemma but also great opportunities. The dilemma, as noted by Feather (2006), lies in the volatility of the digital product itself when it comes to preservation issues.

In addition, there is need for personnel with requisite skills to manage these digital resources. From the data gathered, five institutions (55.6%) had staff that were conversant with digital technologies at a rudimentary level. Two (22.2%) had staff

with intermediate knowledge, whilst one institution (11.1%) was fortunate to have an expert on digital preservation. This contrasted markedly with one institution (11.1%) that lacked any in-house knowledge on digital preservation. From these results, it is discernible that the lack of trained personnel in these new technologies is one of the critical factors confronting archival institutions, which threatens the preservation and availability of digital materials in the long term. The majority mentioned insufficient resources, that is, training and staff shortage as constituting a major threat to the loss of digital material.

Seven (77.8%) archival repositories did rank threats to their electronic records, as summarised in Table 4. Interestingly, technological obsolescence was not considered a threat to their digital records and in this regard it seems reasonable to surmise that the volume of digital records in custody was still low. On the other hand, it could be concluded that the reason they wanted to engage professionals with the necessary expertise was to prepare for the imminent digital revolution. Insufficient policies and plans for preservation were cited by four (44.4%) institutions as the greatest threat to their digital material, whilst for two (22.2%), resources for preservation were on top of the list with regards to the threats to electronic records.

Nonetheless, the aim of an archive is not only to take care of the material housed therein, but also to ensure that researchers and the general public are able to locate and access whatever items are of interest to them. It therefore follows that the ability to make collections available to users should be one of the cornerstones of a successful archival management policy. Use is the goal of all archival endeavour (Harris 2000:24) and the Canadian Archivist, Timothy Ericson (1990:116) has remarked that, '... if, after we brilliantly and meticulously appraise, arrange, describe and conserve our records, nobody comes to use them, then we have wasted our time'.

To highlight the importance of access, the 'Professional code of South African archivists' (South African Society of Archivists [SASA] 1993) begins with a definition of the archival mission as follows:

The archivist is responsible for ensuring the availability and use of permanently valuable archives by identification, acquisition, description and preservation. Accountability to the archives creator, employer and user should shape the performance of these tasks. (p. 106)

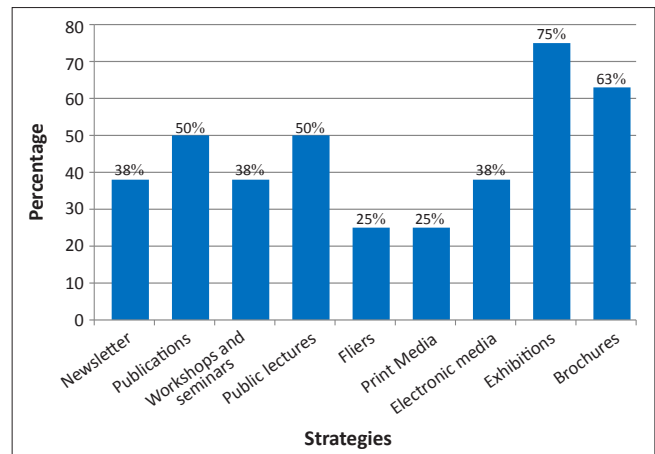
Consequently, respondents were asked questions that sought information about their public programming activities. Respondents also provided additional strategies they used in public programming. From Figure 4, it is discernible that exhibitions, brochures, lectures and publications were popular strategies used in their outreach programmes.

Recommendations

Maingard and Made (1978) remarked that survey findings that only make us feel guilty are pretty useless;

TABLE 4: Ranking of factors that were considered a threat to digital materials within religious repositories in Pietermaritzburg.

Threats to the loss of digital materials	Greatest threat	Moderate threat	Smallest threat	No threat
Technological obsolescence	0	2	2	0
Insufficient policy or plan for preservation	4	1	0	0
Insufficient resources	2	3	1	1



Source: Author's own data

FIGURE 4: Preferred public programming strategies in use by religious repositories in Pietermaritzburg.

hence, it was imperative for this survey to table some recommendations for best practices in archival management. The recommendations centre mainly on matters of advocacy, networking, fire detection and alarms, acquisition policies, disaster planning, digitisation and records management. These recommendations are therefore addressed to all those with an interest in religious archives, *inter alia*, owners, custodians, academic and other researchers, funding bodies and heritage organisations.

Advocacy

Mnjama (2009) noted that access to records and archives is a very important part of their function in society and there is a need for the general public to be made aware of the treasures the archival institutions are holding on their behalf. The NARS (2005) *Directory of archival repositories* stated that repositories are obligated to make their holdings known to potential users and to define their acquisitions or collecting policies and areas of specialisation clearly in relation to those of other institutions to minimise the dispersal of related material and the duplication of collecting endeavours. The carrying over of this message to the general public was referred to by Dearstyne (1993:197) as promotional marketing. Other terms that are used interchangeably with regard to the effort to raise awareness of archives within society and promote their use are 'public programming', 'outreach' or 'archival advocacy'.

Consequently, there should be high-level advocacy to persuade religious bodies and leading individuals within faith communities to value their own historical records as a resource for their mission and activities and to encourage them to celebrate their identity and achievements (Chartres

2010). Commenting on the need to come up with a national association of religious archives or archivists, Lambert (1975) noted that:

... the integration of all major religious archives on an informational level would be greatly facilitated by the formation of a national association of religious archives or archivists. This association, quite apart from the advantages it would bring through the exchange of information and ideas and through personal contacts, could, perhaps, direct the development of religious archives in the coming years. (pp. 61–62)

The establishment of this religious archives group is worth pursuing and the fact that most of the archival repositories covered in this survey belong to the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Institutions makes it logistically much easier to embark on this endeavour. Funds permitting, it would also be ideal to establish a directory of religious archives within Pietermaritzburg and this could also be provincialised, with the long-term objective of making it national. The directory should ideally contain references to the contents and descriptions of the resources of various repositories, both large and small.

Allied to the aforementioned, having an Open Day on Church archives would go a long way in promoting outreach activities. The proposed religious archives group should start by seeking visibility on the Web through having its own website, preferably a portal on religious archives. It is widely acknowledged that the future lies with ICTs and these have to be exploited as much as possible. Mnjama (2009) noted that one way an archive can begin to garner the respect it needs is to develop a website explaining how their institution works and what kinds of information sources may be found within the walls of such a place.

In addition, archival institutions need to move with the times to ensure that they remain relevant. The very use of high-tech tools such as Facebook, Twitter, blogging et cetera by an archival institution is a signal to the public that the institution is not stuck in the past. Archivists therefore need to understand their users before they can accommodate their needs. Neo and Calvert (2012) pointed out that the 'Net Generation' (those born after the early 1980s), for instance, grew up with technology and therefore Facebook can be a marketing tool to reach out to them. Millar (2010) echoed similar sentiments and noted that it has been argued that archival institutions can reach a different audience, that is, the younger generation, by remaining technologically current. The use of mobile phone applications, tweets and the short message service (SMS) are some of the most important emerging ICT applications in Africa (Garaba 2012; Van den Heever 2008:98). Mobile phone technology is versatile or multimedia; that is, it can support other voice, image and video applications, which makes it a handy tool for the religious repositories within Pietermaritzburg.

Finally, the use of community radio stations is an important mechanism for disseminating information about the archives to the public. Bosch (2008) noted that religious community

radio stations, for example, are able to develop and maintain concrete connections with their target audiences. The Roman Catholic Radio Station, Radioveritas, lists as one of its primary objectives in its vision statement the need to be a recognised Catholic broadcaster serving the interests of its community (Radioveritas 2012).

Networking

The networks in place to support those working in the field of religious archives should be strengthened and fostered. This is a cost-effective way of ensuring that the limited resources which can be deployed in support of private archives have the greatest impact. Professional bodies within the wider archival community, such as SAPCON, SASA and the Oral History Association of South Africa should look at ways in which they can support such networks which are vital in providing self-help and the sharing of best practice.

It remains a proven fact that associations support the development of the profession, particularly in terms of capacity building. In the International Federation of Library Associations context, as noted by Bradley (2010), this includes support to develop partnerships, mentoring, guidance on good practices and advocacy planning. Collaboration therefore remains fundamental in the realisation of this dream and Ngulube (2005) also opined that the ability of archivists, librarians and curators to preserve the recorded heritage of humankind mainly lies in building partnerships and collaboration with professionals that share their concern.

Fire detection and alarms

Electronic security measures, such as CCTV, should be used to enhance security of records and archives. Although the majority of archival repositories have fire extinguishers, there has not been investment in fire detection devices such as smoke and heat detectors and fire control panels. Hunter (2003:192) noted that fire extinguishers are only effective as fire suppression devices if the fire is small and detected at an early stage and if there are people present at the scene to operate them. In that light, all repositories that house archival materials should be equipped throughout with a fire detection and alarm system wired directly to the local fire department or to another 24-hour monitor. All detectors and alarms should be regularly tested and maintained according to the manufacturers' specifications. Staff members should work with the local fire department to develop a fire safety programme. Regular fire inspections and drills should be held and staff should be trained in evacuation procedures.

Shepilova (1992) identified a number of factors involved in comparing extinguishing systems. Original cost, reliability, cost of agent, susceptibility to false operation, area of application, damage to records by fire and by extinguishing agent and consequences of failure are all important factors for consideration. Automatic sprinklers are the most reliable and economic means of controlling fires in records storage areas. Wet-pipe sprinklers with hydraulically designed

pipings, adequate water supply and supervised valves are reliable and trouble-free.

Robust acquisition policies

Archival repositories with religious archives should explore ways in which their official written documentation can be complemented by embarking on oral history programmes. Denis (2008) noted that even today, historical information continues to circulate by word of mouth in African societies in particular; hence, it is the oldest form of communication reflecting a capacity to 'recollect in tranquillity', as noted by Mazrui (1985). Hankins (2004) agreed and noted that oral expression and transmission has been the cornerstone of sustaining, perpetuating and disseminating information in many cultures throughout the world. In consequence, reminiscences of retired and currently practicing bishops, priests, sisters, retired workers et cetera, once captured, will supplement and enrich the written record in custody. This viewpoint was echoed by Brooks (1969) who stated that:

The official records of an organization, for example, may provide the framework, the skeleton, of a historical narrative. Private correspondence or memoirs can enrich it with the flesh of personal feeling, opinion or interpretation. (pp. 8–9)

As noted by Denis (1995:35), oral history is the only way to give the Christian people of Africa a role in the writing of their own history, in view of the fact that the indigenous point of view is often ignored or distorted. There is under-documentation about the contribution of the indigenous people to the mission of the Church and the way they incorporated and reconstructed the Christian heritage to make it acceptable from the point of view of traditional culture. The National Archives, the Archives and Records Association and the Religious Archives Group (2010) reinforced this viewpoint and aptly pointed out that:

Collecting policies should seek to be more dynamic to ensure that the full breadth of religious experience is captured and not just the formal or official records of well-established religious bodies and office-holders. (p. 26)

Becken (1992:122) agreed with the above and noted that whilst the now defunct Society for African Church History, established in 1962 was concerned with all kinds of documentation, including for example monumental inscriptions, archives, mission and newspaper records, it emphasised from the beginning also the value of oral history. It noted that (Becken 1992):

Written records do not cover all church activities. Every church group has some activities undocumented which individual memories might cover. Some church groups have written records. Collection of oral history should be commended to all local church history groups. (p. 122)

Becken (1992) further cited the International Association for Mission Studies, which declared at one of their meetings in 1980 that:

We emphasise, in particular, the importance of oral records. It is a problem in many Christian communities that the literate culture does not correspond with what people communicate in the oral culture. An archive which gives adequate attention to

both the literate and oral culture is a means of communication and integration in the Church, and it helps to build up a more inclusive understanding of Christian identity. (p. 122)

In consequence, this means that archivists are encouraged not only to record the spoken word, but also its expression in the worship life of the community of faith, for example, liturgy, ritual, invocations, prayers, hymns and choruses, because, especially in Africa, the ceremonial gives expression to the sense of group solidarity and of dependence on God (Becken 1992:130; Denis 1995:32).

Disaster planning

Ngulube (2003) remarked that disaster planning ensures that institutions are prepared to respond quickly to emergencies. Disaster mitigation, or the ability to identify risks and prevent some emergencies from happening, should always play a key role in an institution's emergency preparedness and planning efforts. In addition to large-scale emergencies, institutions should also be aware of the danger to their holdings from roof leaks, pest infestation, mould blooms, theft and fire. Despite the fact that a disaster preparedness plan allows an organisation to plan and make decisions about emergency response and recovery, only three (33.3%) of archival repositories in Pietermaritzburg had made it part of their preservation strategy.

It is therefore strongly recommended for those institutions without a disaster plan to make sure they have one in place without further delay. In addition, the plans should be well researched and tailored to fit the specific needs of each repository. The plans should include planned responses to both internal and external disasters and should be reviewed with all staff. This plan should (Seton & Smalley 2003):

- Assess risks to the building and the collections, for example fire or flood.
- Include a floor plan of the archives facility, showing outlets, drains, et cetera.
- Implement steps to remove or reduce risk, for example fire prevention.
- Specify in writing the location of particularly valuable or vulnerable materials in the archives.
- Specify the location of inventory of emergency supplies such as plastic sheeting, paper towels and fans.
- Outline specific steps to be taken by staff in case of emergency, prioritising as necessary. It may be useful to set up a 'telephone tree' or plan for contacting staff in order to obtain their help quickly.
- Outline plans for recovery, salvage.

It should also be pointed out that the plan on its own will not deal with disasters (Mathews 2009) and people therefore need to know what to do with it and what their roles are in particular stages or aspects, which calls for training. Management support is thus critical at all stages and the plan will need to be tested, reviewed and updated, otherwise it will be a file sitting on the shelf: 'If people don't own their plan, invest in it, it won't work' (US Museum and Library, cited in Mathews 2009).

Digitisation

The onset of digitisation has brought a new dimension to the way records are being stored and this comes in the wake of an electronic environment which is highly unstable and which threatens the integrity of digital records. Digital records are here to stay and how these are to be stored has only compounded an existing preservation problem. The challenges posed by the new media call for constant upgrading of knowledge and skills. It therefore means that the new media needs to be safeguarded from technological obsolescence and media impermanence. From the anecdotal evidence gathered, the volume of digital records is still very small, but institutions are encountering challenges in their management especially with regard to expertise and preservation issues.

It is still early for archival repositories with religious records to embark on full-scale digitisation per se but they should start forthwith to prepare for the inevitable. Archival repositories will need to start planning around the modalities of having the digital infrastructure within their walls and this includes deciding on the content management software (CMS), installation, customisation and support and training on using the CMS. The development of a community blog on digitised materials and related matters should be seriously considered as well. Liaison with Digital Innovation South Africa and other vendors could help.

Records management

The National Archives *et al.* (2010) rightly noted that the archives of the future can only be formed if good record-keeping practices are followed in relation to current records. The establishment of a records management programme, which will include a full-scale inventory thereby leading to the development of a records disposition schedule, is recommended. Cox (1992) opined that the establishment of a records management programme can also enhance the preservation of archival records before they come to the archives. Although this survey was concerned only with historical records, more research on the records management practices of some of these archival repositories is strongly encouraged.

Conclusion

The survey has presented an overview of the status of religious archives in Pietermaritzburg and the attendant challenges these archival repositories are confronted with. From the evidence gathered, it shows that despite the richness of this ecclesiastical heritage much is at risk or threat. Few surviving collections remaining in the hands of religious institutions benefit from custom-built or suitably adapted accommodation and neither are disaster plans in place to safeguard this heritage as only three (33.3%) had made it part of their preservation strategy. From the responses received, only two (22.2%) archival institutions had custom-built accommodation, with four (44.4%) having had their facilities adapted to house their collections. Three (33.3%) did not have

dedicated storage and one of these without was transferring their material to collecting institutions. In addition, one of the three institutions without dedicated storage confirmed that plans were afoot to establish their own archival repository and that a project team was already in place to commence with the initiative.

Archival collections in the three institutions without dedicated storage were in a poor state. Observation visits confirmed this as archival material was housed in deplorable conditions in the repository with miscellaneous items such as old computers, typewriters, vacuum cleaners et cetera. In addition, acid-free boxes with minutes, reports, project plans et cetera were shelved on wooden shelves that were poorly constructed and the disorganisation of the archives meant retrieving a document was a Herculean task. This disorganisation is evidence of lack of systematic retirement of records because there is no records management programme that provides for the orderly transfer of valuable records to their archives when these records' usefulness as current or active comes to an end.

To make matters worse, records were stored on the floor, which is against the standard practice of ensuring that they are at least 15 cm – 25 cm off the floor to minimise damage in the event of flooding. Interviews with the officers concerned pointed to the lack of space, unawareness and lack of professional advice on archival management. Be that as it may, the bottom line is that the majority of archival repositories are under-funded and under-supported and this compounds an already precarious situation as the heritage in their custody is under threat.

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