Long-time members will know that it’s been a while since the ACHS has published a newsletter. Even though more and more of our communication takes place digitally, we thought it important to revive the tradition. It’s a great way of keeping members informed of our activities and promoting the work of the Society. Plus, it serves as a handy historical record of our many accomplishments.

Please take a look at the news and events we’ve included in this issue. I’m sure there will be much to catch your eye and your interest. The past year has been an incredibly productive one for the Society, including a great deal of work that has taken place behind the scenes. Read all about it.

There are many people who deserve recognition for their contributions to the ACHS. I’m grateful to my fellow officers and members of the Board of Managers who give generously of their time and talents in so many ways. I’m also grateful to those who have accepted our invitation to speak at the ACHS and who have contributed their articles and reviews to our journal.

But most especially, I’m thankful to all of our members, subscribers, and benefactors for your continued support. It’s your interest in American Catholic history, both locally and nationally, that keeps the ACHS alive and active. We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events and hope that you’ll share news of our activities with others. Together, we’ll ensure that American Catholic history has a bright future!

Sincerely,

Michael H. Finnegan
President, ACHS

From Our President

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About the ACHS

Founded in 1886, the American Catholic Historical Society (ACHS) was established for the purpose of collecting and preserving materials related to the Catholic Church in the United States and for documenting the contributions of Catholics to the building our nation. It is the oldest historical organization of its kind in the United States.

An independent, non-profit organization, the ACHS today continues to promote the documentation and interpretation of the history of the Catholic Church in the United States. It accomplishes its ongoing mission by publishing an award-winning academic journal, *American Catholic Studies*; sponsoring public lectures and other society events; and supporting the preservation of its historical collections located at the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center.

Members of the Society come from all faiths and membership has no restrictions on race, religion, or national origins. It includes all persons who share an interest in the history of American Catholicism.

**BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP**

- A subscription to Society’s award-winning quarterly journal, *American Catholic Studies*.
- Discounted pricing for the ACHS’s annual lectures and other events.
- Invitation to regular social gatherings, including our annual Christmas Party, St. Patrick’s Day Social, and Summer Garden Party.

**Spotlighting Local History**

In commitment to its Philadelphia roots, the ACHS has recently inaugurated a new series of talks that highlight the remarkable history of Catholicism in the Philadelphia area. This *Spotlight on Local History* series provides a forum to showcase the research being done by local scholars, parish historians, and others.

This past year, we were proud to feature Mr. Leo Vaccaro, a history teacher at St. Joseph’s Prep, who shared his research into North Philadelphia's Church of the Gesu. Earlier in the series, Mr. Christopher Gibbons, an alumnus of Roman Catholic High School, shared his work recovering the names of Roman’s forgotten veterans – its “lost boys” – of World War I.

This fall – on Sunday, September 18, 2016 at 2pm – we will welcome Sr. Mary Helen Beirne, to speak on the history of her community, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Chestnut Hill. The event, like all those in this series, is free and open to the public.

These events are a great way of welcoming new friends to the ACHS, so help spread the word!
The 2015 Barry Award Dinner

More than 500 people gathered on Friday, November 20, 2015 at the Union League of Philadelphia to honor Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA, the President of Villanova University, as he received the American Catholic Historical Society’s Commodore John Barry Award. Named for the father of the American Navy, the Barry Award is bestowed upon those whose professional accomplishments and contributions to the church and the community have been deemed outstanding.

An esteemed leader in Catholic higher education, Father Donohue has served as President of Villanova University since 2006. Under his transformative leadership, the university has steadily enhanced its academic reputation while maintaining its distinctive identity as an Augustinian, Catholic institution. The Society has honored him for his dedication to promoting scholarly excellence, his devotedness to student learning, and his commitment to seeing Augustinian principles put into action through service at home and abroad.

The evening’s celebration began with a cocktail reception before moving to the Lincoln Ballroom for dinner and the award presentation, with Villanova’s Provost, Patrick Maggitti, serving as the master of ceremonies. Adding to the evening’s festivities were student performances by Villanova University’s Jazz Quartet and an acappella group, Vocal Minority. Also in attendance were many of Fr. Donohue’s brother Augustinians, which was especially fitting given the close connection between the order and ACHS from the Society’s earliest days. Most notably, Father Thomas Middleton, OSA, president of Villanova from 1876-1878, served as the first president of the ACHS.

We are grateful to all those who attended the dinner or served as patrons and benefactors. As our sole fundraising event of the year, proceeds from the Barry Dinner help sustain the work of the Society. The donations received help us maintain our facilities, expand our public programming, support historical research, and underwrite the publication of our award-winning quarterly journal, American Catholic Studies.
Urban Trinity: The Story of Catholic Philadelphia

Just as Philadelphia has played an important role in American Catholic History, Catholicism has profoundly shaped the history of the city itself. That interplay is central to Urban Trinity: The Story of Catholic Philadelphia, the new documentary by History Making Productions that was released in 2015 in conjunction with the World Meeting of Families and Pope Francis’s visit to Philadelphia.

Although the ACHS can’t take credit for the documentary itself, our members contributed significantly to the project. In addition to Dr. Katie Oxx, who served as a producer and senior historian for the project, several of our board members were interviewed for the documentary and were among its featured experts. They include Mr. Lou Baldwin, Mr. Louis Ferrero, Mr. Michael Finnegan, Dr. Margaret McGuinness, Fr. John McNamee, Dr. Nicholas Rademacher, Dr. Thomas Rzeznik, and Dr. Rodger Van Allen. We’re proud to have helped bring this incredible film to life.

American Catholic Studies

American Catholic Studies – the oldest, continuously published Catholic scholarly journal in the United States – is committed to encouraging research and publishing articles on the American Catholic experience. The quarterly journal features broad-ranging scholarship that contributes to our understanding of Catholicism in the American context as it intersects with history, literature, culture, politics, art and architecture, theology, and popular movements.

The journal has won numerous awards from the Catholic Press Association over the years, including first place for General Excellence among Catholic scholarly journals for 2013 and 2015 and multiple prizes for its articles and reviews.

Of particular appeal is the lively and engaging writing style…Though scholarly in its approach, this journal truly has mass appeal.
— Catholic Press Association

Published at Villanova University, the journal reaches a national and international audience through our agreement with Project MUSE, a scholarly database that provides full-text digital access to member libraries in the United States and internationally.

Your membership in the American Catholic Historical Society automatically subscribes you to American Catholic Studies. All members are subscribers, and all subscribers are members!
The ACHS at Work

This past year has been an incredibly busy and productive one for the American Catholic Historical Society. In addition to expanding our public programming and improving the quality of our journal, the ACHS has also done a lot of work that was not always immediately apparent to our members and visitors.

Faithful attendees to our lectures and events might have noticed several improvements made to the ACHS house in the past twelve months. The bathrooms were repainted and the brick pathway in the garden was re-laid to address some buckling that had been caused by the roots of our stately sycamore. We also installed a new projection screen and gallery rails on the first floor, allowing us to use that space more effectively for talks and displays.

Beyond our own events, members of the ACHS continue to serve as a critical resource for advancing Catholic history within the community. Most prominently, our recording secretary, Dr. Katie Oxx, served as a producer and the senior historian for the *Urban Trinity: The Story of Catholic Philadelphia*, the three-part documentary that aired during the World Meeting of Families. Also during Pope Francis’s visit to Philadelphia, our vice president, Dr. Thomas Rzeznik, provided commentary during a special episode of WHYY radio’s *NewsWorks Tonight*. At Christmastime, he and follow ACHS board member, Dr. Margaret McGuinness, spoke at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania as part of a special program celebrating Philadelphia’s religious and ethnic heritage. We also sponsor the Msgr. James P. McCoy Church History prize awarded annually to a student at St. Charles Seminary.

In addition to these scholarly contributions, the ACHS has also made some important financial contributions this past year. Although the ACHS is not a grant-making organization, we do strive to use our resources to support causes that advance the Society’s mission of promoting the history of American Catholicism. During the past year, therefore, the Society agreed to make two substantial gifts to that end. The first was a donation to History Making Productions to support the making of *Urban Trinity*. Financial contributions from the ACHS and other individuals, groups, and foundations allowed History Making Productions to invest more substantially in the series and make it available for free viewing online so that it can reach the widest possible audience.

The second was a donation to the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center (PAHRC) that allowed them to secure a matching grant from the Catholic Foundation of Greater Philadelphia for the purchase of a state-of-the-art microfilm reader/printer with digital scanning capabilities. The new machine has greatly improved the accessibility of sacramental records, historic newspapers like the *Catholic Standard and Times*, and other microfilmed materials. Anyone who has ever worked with the old readers will immediately recognize the benefits of the new equipment.

The ACHS has also worked closely this past year with PAHRC in another substantial way. Given the anticipated consolidation of the seminary and possible sale of the Overbrook campus, plans are underway to relocate the archives from its current location to a new facility in Northeast Philadelphia. The ACHS has had representation on the archdiocese’s archives advisory committee and has its own task force working to secure a home for duplicate books and some extraneous ACHS materials that have been deaccessioned from the archives’ holdings. We share their commitment to preserving the core collection of Catholic Americana and ensuring that PAHRC remains one of the leading centers for Catholic historical research in the United States.

In the coming year, we hope to expand on these accomplishments, especially with new programming initiatives and efforts to increase our public visibility. Our thanks goes out to all of our members and subscribers whose continued support makes all of this possible.
ICYMI: Events of the Past Year

Exhibit
In celebration of Pope Francis’s historic visit to Philadelphia for the World Meeting of Families, the ACHS was inspired to look back at the history of past papal visits with a new exhibit, “Before Francis: Popes, Pilgrims and the History of Philadelphia-Vatican Ties.” Composed and curated by historian and ACHS vice president, Thomas Rzeznik, the exhibit included materials from the ACHS’s own collections and the holdings of the Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Research Center.

Lectures
We continued our twice-annual lecture series, inviting prominent scholars working in the field of American Catholic History to speak at the ACHS house. As has been our tradition, these lectures are preceded by a social hour and dinner, with discounted pricing for ACHS members.

In October, ACHS board member Dr. Katie Oxx of St. Joseph’s University came with other members of the production team to talk to us about the making of Urban Trinity: The Story of Catholic Philadelphia, the three part documentary that aired on 6ABC during the World Meeting of Families. An overwhelming response forced us to move the event up the street to the parish hall at Old St. Joseph’s Church.

In April, our spring lecture featured Dr. Todd Scribner, the educational outreach coordinator for the USCCB, who drew on his new history of Catholic neo-conservatives to discuss the decline of Catholic identity in the post-World War II era and the possibility today for a “new Catholic moment.”

Local History Talks
In the past two years, we have expanded our lectures to include a new series of talks that spotlight local history. Free and open to the public, these events have drawn larger crowds than we expected.

In February, Mr. Leo Vaccaro of St. Joseph’s Prep shared his research on North Philadelphia’s Church of the Gesu and spoke about the community’s efforts to preserve the building as sacred space. We were thrilled to have a packed house as people ventured out despite the winter chill.

In May, we welcomed local author and journalist, Thom Nickels, who shared stories from his new book, Literary Philadelphia: A History of Poetry and Prose in the City of Brotherly Love. He highlighted the contributions of Philadelphia’s Catholic literati, including essayist Agnes Repplier and novelist John McIntyre.

Parties and Socials
What would the ACHS be without its social gatherings? Every year, we open our house to members and friends for our annual Christmas Party, St. Patrick’s Day Social, and Summer Garden Party. Be sure to join us for our socials throughout the coming year and pass along invitations to friends who share an interest in history and like having a good time!
As part of our ongoing local history series, Sr. Mary Helen Beirne, SSJ, will speak in September on her new history of the Sisters of Saint Joseph.

Elizabeth Hayes Alvarez’s new book on the Virgin Mary in nineteenth century American culture will be the feature of our annual fall lecture this October.
Your Membership Sustains the Work of the ACHS. Join or Renew Today!

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