

American Catholic Historical Society

263 SOUTH FOURTH STREET | PHILADELPHIA, PA 19106 | AMCHS.ORG

FALL 2026



From Our President

I can't believe it's Fall already. We made it through a cold winter, a hot summer, a World Cup, an MLB All Star Game, and an America 250 celebration. There is a lot to read in this newsletter, a lot of catching up, and a lot of great events in store.

This past year we continued to work on our strategic plan implementation. We held a board retreat at the archdiocesan archives to get our new board members up to date and to acquaint all of us with the ACHS collections held there.

One of the things we noted during the archives visit was the decaying condition of our Catholic newspaper collection. We hold some of the only copies in existence of these publications. We are partnering with Boston College to get them scanned to preserve them for future generations and be available for online research or perusing. This is a natural extension of the scanning work that we have been doing with the *Catholic Standard and Times* and our own Society records.

You have most likely seen our increased social media presence, as well as our standardized color schemes and fresh new logo. We hope that these efforts help us showcase our work and improve our visibility.

Efforts are underway for the 2026 Barry Award to be given to Daniel DiLella on Tuesday, November 24th. Please note that is a change from our usual Friday night due to scheduling. It will be a great evening so please plan on attending or supporting us as a sponsor.

As always, many thanks to all of you for continuing to be members, subscribers, and advocates of American Catholic history, and particularly the work of the American Catholic Historical Society.

Sincerely,

Michael H. Finnegan
President, ACHS



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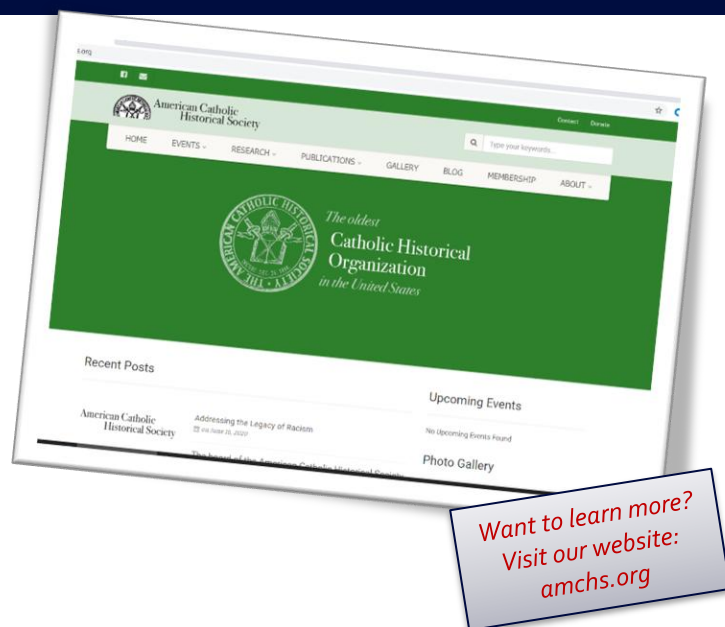
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About the ACHS

Founded in 1884, the American Catholic Historical Society (ACHS) was established for the purpose of collecting and preserving materials related to the history of the Catholic Church in the United States and for documenting the contributions of Catholics to the building of the nation. It is the oldest historical society of its kind in the United States.

An independent, non-profit organization, the ACHS 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 Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

Membership in the Society is open to all persons who share an interest in the history of American Catholicism.



BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

- A subscription to the Society's award-winning quarterly journal, *American Catholic Studies*, with free online access to back issues.
- Discounted pricing for ACHS lectures and other events.
- Invitation to regular social gatherings, including our annual Christmas Party and summer Garden Party.
- Knowledge that you support the ongoing mission of the Society!

New Exhibit - Revolutionary Catholics

At this past June's garden party, the ACHS unveiled a new display on "Revolutionary Catholics," as part of the celebration of America 250.

The new exhibit highlights Catholic contributions to the revolutionary struggle and the founding of the new nation, as well as the ways that the revolutionary experience shaped the development of the Catholic Church in the United States. It also examines how these revolutionary Catholics have been remembered and recounted by later generations who endeavored to write Catholics into the history of the United States.

The exhibit drew inspiration from the pioneering work of past generations of ACHS members who helped preserve

and promote the history of the revolutionary generation. Most notable among them is Martin I. J. Griffin, one of



the Society's founders, whose three-volume *Catholics and the American Revolution* remains an invaluable resource for scholars.

The exhibit was prepared by students at Seton Hall University as part of a Public History Practicum taught by ACHS board member, Dr. Thomas Rzeznek. The class provided students with practical, hands-on experience in the work of exhibit development and an opportunity to hone their skills in historical research and interpretation. One high point of the class was a trip to the Philadelphia archdiocesan archives to explore materials from the ACHS collections.

The exhibit will be on view at all ACHS events during the 2026-2027 year.



The master of ceremonies for the 2025 Barry Award Dinner was Patrick W. McGrory, chairperson of the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities.

BARRY AWARD DINNER – 2026



Save the date! The Society's annual Barry Award Dinner will be held on Tuesday, November 24, 2026, at the Union League of Philadelphia. We are delighted to honor Daniel M. DiLella for his outstanding contributions to the church and society.

A successful businessman and stalwart supporter of Catholic and Philadelphia institutions, Mr. DiLella has a long history of generosity towards numerous community, educational, and charitable organizations.

We look forward to having our members, friends, and benefactors join us on November 24 as we celebrate the work of the ACHS and honor Mr. DiLella.

2025 Barry Honoree Kerry Alys Robinson

Every year, the American Catholic Historical Society bestows its Commodore John Barry Award upon an individual or individuals whose professional accomplishments and contributions to the church and the community have been deemed outstanding.

This past November, the Society was pleased to honor Kerry Alys Robinson, President and CEO of Catholic Charities USA. She is only the second woman and second layperson in that position. Prior to that role, she served as the founding executive director of the Leadership Roundtable, an organization founded in the wake of the abuse crisis with a mission to help the church heal and move forward by promoting and implementing best management practices to build a leadership culture that is co-responsible, transparent, and accountable.

Robinson's efforts to promote more effective ministry have also extended to service to the Vatican, where she has advised the church on how to empower and engage women leaders. As a member of the Raskob Foundation for Catholic Activities and FADICA (Foundations and Donors Interested in Catholic Activities), she has been an advisor and trustee to more than twenty-five grantmaking foundations, charitable nonprofits, and family philanthropies.

Those who know her attest to her generous spirit and commitment to service. At the dinner, Robinson's sister, Noelle, remarked how "No one is a stranger to Kerry. Anyone who meets her leaves feeling loved and truly listened to." Her life has been one of faith in action, guided by an "unwavering compassion and her ability to see the face of God in every person she encounters."

In reflecting upon receiving the Barry Award, Robinson shared how "I care deeply about the church. Its explicit religious mission has formed the person I am. That it is the largest humanitarian network in the world renders me forever committed to his health and vitality."



ACHS President Michael Finnegan and 2025 Barry honoree Kerry Alys Robinson

Follow the ACHS on Social Media

Join our growing social media community for exclusive posts featuring the history of artifacts in our collection, upcoming events, local parish highlights, papal news, publications, and more!

See frequent posts featuring:

- Photos, paintings, and other works of art
- Prominent American Catholics
- Historic publications and artifacts
- Catholic news and observances
- Local and national Catholic history

If you're on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter/X, please like and share so that more people can learn about our work and gain greater appreciation for American Catholic history.



American Catholic Studies

American Catholic Studies – the oldest, continuously published Catholic scholarly journal in the United States – is committed to promoting research and publishing articles on the American Catholic experience. The quarterly journal features wide-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 received numerous awards from the Catholic Media Association over the years, including First Place for General Excellence among scholarly journals on several occasions.

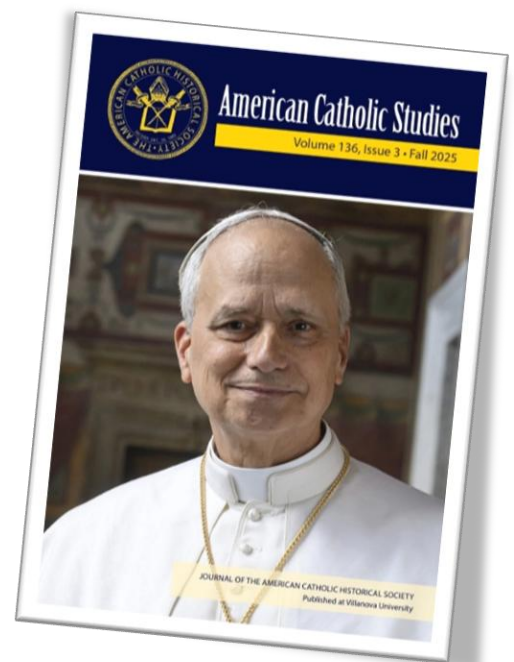
Consistent excellence in topics, editing, design, and presentation. This publication...attracts solid scholars who offer relevant topics of current interest.

– Catholic Media Association

Published at Villanova University, the journal reaches a national and international audience through our agreements with JSTOR and Project Muse, scholarly databases that provide 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!



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ACHS News and Notes

The past year has been another eventful one for the Society. One point of pride has been the success of our social media efforts. Thanks to the work of our social media committee, our posts have become more frequent and have attracted increased attention from our followers. You might also have noticed that we have a new video about the ACHS that greets visitors to our website. The video is also available on our YouTube page, along with some of our past lectures and other Barry Award tributes. Please follow us on social media and invite others to do the same by sharing our posts.

Among the other high points of the year, our annual garden party in June served as a great friend-raising event. Joining us that evening were representatives from several local organizations, including the William Penn Foundation, Partners for Sacred Places, the University of Pennsylvania Libraries, the Conservation Center for Art and Historical Artifacts, and Mother Bethel AME Church. We were delighted to have them tour the house and get to know more about the Society and its activities.

The garden party also provided us with the occasion to honor the contributions of one of our dedicated board members, Dr. Thomas Rzeznik, who was recognized with the Society's distinguished service award. Since joining the board in 2011, he has taken on a number of important roles and responsibilities. In addition to serving as co-editor of *American Catholic Studies* since 2013, he has been the coordinator of our lecture series, spearheaded the establishment of our research travel grant program, and developed five exhibits for display in the front room of the Society's house. The award is richly deserved for all that he has done to enhance the Society's vitality and visibility.



Dr. Thomas Rzeznik and ACHS President Michael Finnegan

The Society has taken steps this year to enhance access to its collections and preserve some of its most rare and fragile holdings, as noted in the president's message on the front page of this newsletter. The board allocated funds to support the further digitization of its historic newspaper collections, partnering with Boston College to make those materials available to scholars as part of its online Catholica Collection (<https://archive.org/details/catholica>). We are grateful to ACHS board member Patrick Shank, the archivist for the Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, which holds the ACHS collections, for his work overseeing these important efforts.

For a third year, the ACHS sponsored a research travel grant to help support scholarship. The award provides up to \$2500 to a scholar or researcher working on any project related to American Catholic history who needs to conduct research in any archive, library, or repository in the five-county Philadelphia area. This year's recipient was Phil Chivily, a doctoral candidate at Baylor University, who used the grant to conduct research at the Catholic Historical Research Center of the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, the Archives of the Sisters of St. Francis of Philadelphia, and the Archives of the Diocese of Wilmington on a project examining Black Catholic missions and parishes in the Chesapeake region.

Finally, we are pleased to announce that the Society added three new members to its Board of Managers: MarySheila McDonald, the John F. Scarpa Professor of Entrepreneurship at Villanova University and director of the Scarpa Center for Entrepreneurship and Law; Alex Palma, the archivist for the Lasallian District of Eastern North America and experienced public historian who has worked on projects at Carpenter's Hall, Christ Church, and Laurel Hill Cemetery; and Emily Wells, the archivist for the Society of the Holy Child Jesus Generalate and American Province Archives in Rosemont, Pennsylvania.

They each bring a range of experience to the Society and have already begun to contribute to various initiatives. In accepting her appointment, McDonald stated "I am honored to join in the important mission of the ACHS and look forward to promoting greater awareness of and access to the amazing artifacts and resources of the Society." Wells likewise expressed how she looks forward "to being both a steward of the past and an advocate for the future." In addition to welcoming McDonald, Palma, and Wells, we also thank Patrick Hayes and Monsignor Gregory Fairbanks, who have stepped down from the board, for their dedicated service.

Recap of Our 2025-2026 Events



Dr. Stephen Koeth, CSC, discusses his new work, *Crabgrass Catholicism*.



Dr. Tia Noelle Pratt speaking on her new book, *Black and Catholic*.



Darrin Pufall Purdy shares his research documenting the traditional habits of Catholic sisters.

This past year's programming was remarkably rich and rewarding. We were particularly delighted to feature talks by four ACHS members, each of whom had recently published a new book.

Our fall season began in September with Dr. Joseph Mannard sharing the story of the "1831 Scandal of Sister Gertrude, America's First Runaway Nun" based on his book on Ann Gertrude Wightt, published by Georgetown University Press. He described her career as a pioneering Catholic educator, her decision to leave the convent, and the efforts of church leaders to manage the news of her action.

In October, we welcomed Dr. Stephen Koeth, CSC, of the University of Notre Dame to talk about his new book, *Crabgrass Catholicism: How Suburbanization Transformed Faith and Politics in Postwar America*. Focusing on Long Island, his work documents the impact of mass suburbanization on American Catholicism, including the challenges of managing institutional growth and negotiating changing cultural outlooks as Catholics left their urban enclaves for the nation's booming suburbs.

Our spring season began in January with a talk by Deacon Alex Solsma, a student at St. Charles Seminary who has since been ordained for the Diocese of Arlington, Virginia. He shared his research on the life of Stephen Kane, a World War II chaplain who ministered to prisoners of war at Stalag 17. Solsma became interested in Kane's story as a fellow Iowa native.

We then in February welcomed Dr. Deborah Kanter, who discussed her new book, *Pioneers of Latino Ministry: Claretians and the Evolving World of Catholic America*. In chronicling the story of the Claretians—a men's religious order from Spain whose ministry in the United States dates to 1902—she shows how they took the lead in accompanying Mexican immigrants and other Spanish speaking groups in ways that helped nurture those communities.

Our April lecture featured Dr. Tia Noelle Pratt of Villanova University and former member of the ACHS board of managers, who spoke on her new book, *Black and Catholic: Racism, Identity, and Religion*. The work calls attention to the exclusion, erasure, and systemic racism that Black Catholics have faced within the church, while also exploring the important role that liturgy and music play in fostering Black Catholic community. Among the case studies that inform her work is the history of the former St. Peter Claver Parish in Philadelphia.

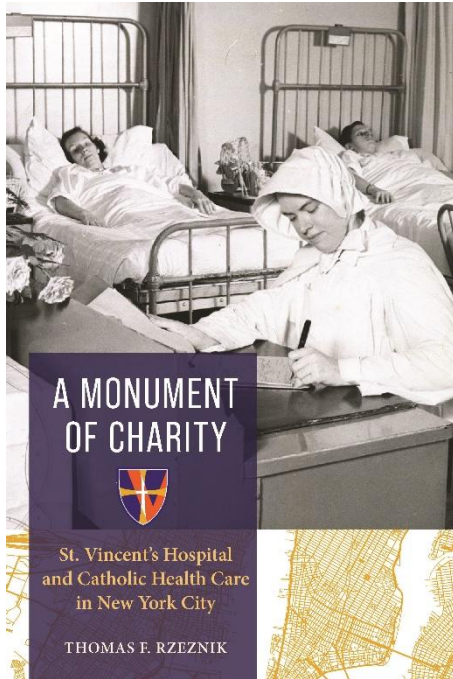
The year concluded with a tremendously engaging talk by Darrin Pufall Purdy, a professor of theater and costume design at Boise State University, who shared his work on documenting and replicating the traditional habit of the Sisters of Charity of New York. His talk drew a sizable audience and was later featured in *Our Sunday Visitor / Catholic News Service* and *Global Sisters Report*.

Did you miss a talk? Recordings of many of our lectures can be found on our website.

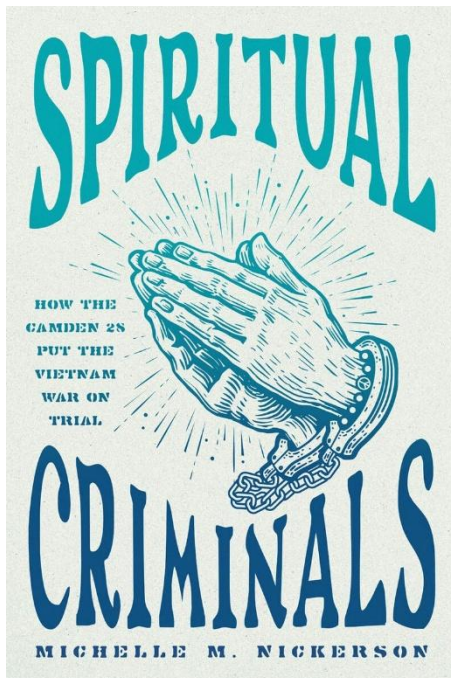
As part of our mission, the ACHS strives to provide a space and an opportunity for parish historians, amateur scholars, and others who are passionate about history to share their work with an appreciative audience. Those interested in sharing their research are encouraged to contact us at info@amchs.org.

Want to keep
informed about
our events?
Follow us on
social media!

2026-2027 Calendar of Events



Dr. Thomas Rzeznik will open our lecture series with a talk on the history of St. Vincent's Hospital and Catholic health care in New York City.



Our October lecture will feature Dr. Michelle Nickerson speaking on the trial of the Camden 28 and Catholic anti-Vietnam War activism.

Sunday, September 20, 2026 @ 2pm

Dr. Thomas Rzeznik

A Monument of Charity: St. Vincent's Hospital and Catholic Health Care in New York City

Free and Open to the Public

Tuesday, October 20, 2026

6pm Social Hour | 7pm Lecture

Dr. Michelle Nickerson

Spiritual Criminals: How the Camden 28 Put the Vietnam War on Trial

Free and Open to the Public

Tuesday, November 24, 2026

Barry Award Dinner

Honoring Daniel M. DiLella

Union League of Philadelphia

Friday, December 11, 2026

Annual Christmas Party

\$25 members / \$35 non-members

Sunday, January 17, 2027 @ 2pm

Dr. Ines Murzaku

Mother Teresa's Revolutions: From the Original Constitutions to Philadelphia

Free and Open to the Public

Sunday, February 21, 2027 @ 2pm

Mr. John Dougherty

When Catholics Ruled Hollywood

Free and Open to the Public

Sunday, March 14, 2027 @ 2pm

Annual St. Patrick's Day Social

\$25 members / \$35 non-members

Tuesday, April 20, 2027

6pm Social Hour | 7pm Lecture

Dr. Carol Loeb Schloss

Flannery and Regina: The Andalusia Chronicles

Free and Open to the Public

Tuesday, May 11, 2027

6pm Lecture — via Zoom

Mr. Robert O'Sullivan

Mathew Carey: America's Pioneering Catholic Printer

Free and Open to the Public

Friday, June 4, 2027 @ 6pm

Annual Garden Party

\$25 members and non-members

AND OTHER EVENTS AS THEY ARE ADDED

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The Society is a non-profit organization as described under Code 501-C-3 of the Internal Revenue Service. All contributions are tax-deductible. ACHS membership is represented in all parts of the world. It consists of people of all faiths and has no restrictions on race, religion or national origin.

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