Archivists
FOR CONGREGATIONS OF
Women Religious

Inclusion & Social Justice in the Archives:

A Resource Guide

Updated January 2026

INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, archivists have begun to reckon with their positions as caretakers of materials that uphold white supremacy, racism, homophobia, classicism, and other causes of systemic injustice in society. The archives of women religious give voice to those historically silenced by inequity, including women, children, and immigrants, who were served by Catholic sisters' ministries throughout history. The following free resources give archivists tools to examine their places in these systems and offer guidance on how to work with the marginalized communities their collections represent.

Ongoing Initiatives for Women Religious

Two social justice initiatives are ongoing and specific to women religious archives.

- Catholic Truth and Healing: Catholic-Operated Native Boarding Schools in the United States, pre-1978, a project begun in 2023 by members of ACWR in consultation with Native experts, comprises several resources on addressing the issues surrounding Native American Boarding Schools, particularly congregation members' historical involvement in them.
- Catholic Religious Organizations Studying Slavery (CROSS), was established in March 2021 by representatives of the Archdiocese of St. Louis and the Jesuit Slavery, History, Memory, and Reconciliation Project. Members of CROSS work to improve access to the records of the enslaved and those who enslaved them. In addition, they promote active engagement with this subject, encouraging discourse on the legacies of slavery in the United States, and advocating for institutional responses.

Catholic Directories Online

Below are resources from archival experts that provide a starting point for social justice and inclusion in archival practices. This list is not exhaustive, but is meant to provide an overview to information professionals interested in these topics.

General Sources

- Caswell, Michelle, 2021. *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (New York: Routledge). "Throughout, this book moves toward a new understanding of the nature of archival work. It provides us with new language to describe the ethical obligations of memory workers, and shifts us from a cruel and cold neutrality to a messy engaged commitment to co-liberation" (22).
- Jimerson, Randall C., 2007. "Archives for All: Professional Responsibility and Social Justice," *The American Archivist*. An overview of social justice work in the archives during the 2000s.
- *Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies*, all volumes. "The Journal of Critical Library and Information Studies aims to showcase innovative research that queries and critiques current and prevailing paradigms in library and information studies, in theory and practice through critical approaches and perspectives that originate from across the humanities and social sciences."

Antiracism in Archives

- Archives for Black Lives in Philadelphia (2020), *Anti-racist Description Resources*. "The recommendations are intended to combat the racist structures inherent in predominantly white institutions and in archival description of underrepresented and marginalized groups, in particular those in the Black community" (i).

- Caswell, Michelle (2017), "Teaching to Dismantle White Supremacy in Archives," *The Library Quarterly*. "This article reflects on an exercise [the author] developed to enable students to identify the ways in which white privilege is embedded in archival institutions and to collectively strategize concrete steps to dismantle white supremacy in their own archival practice" (abstract).

- Schilling, Angela (2023), "Anti-Racist Archival Description," *Archives & Manuscripts*. "This paper will discuss practical ways in which archivists can actively undertake anti-racist description work, and why it is imperative that this work becomes a priority in our collection management work" (abstract).

- Protocols for Native American Archival Materials website, Society of American Archivists Native American Archives Section. This website contains several resources from the Native American Archives Section, as well as resources compiled from outside sources.

Disability Advocacy in Archives

- Brilmyer, Gracen (2022), "Toward a Crip Provenance: Centering disability in archives through its absence," *The Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*. "Put in conversation with disability studies scholarship, which critiques rehabilitating, curing, and restoring, this article outlines the theoretical scaffolding of a crip provenance: a disability-centered framework of resisting the desire to restore and instead meets records where they are at" (abstract). Brilmyer has written extensively on this topic in several open-source articles. Some examples are in *Archival Science* (2018, 2022), *Archivaria* (2022), and the *Journal of Feminist Scholarship* (2020).

- Pearson, Abigail, et al. (2023), "Breaking out of the box: Increasing the representation of disability within archive science," *Archival Science*. "This article explores the value of archives in increasing the representation of disabled people in social policy, and research narratives, as well as building an identity of the Disabled People's Movement beyond traditional activism, and the inclusion of young people and marginalised groups within archives" (abstract).

Environmental Justice in Archives

- Addis, Matthew (2023), "What is the carbon footprint of large-scale global digital preservation?" *Digital Preservation Coalition*. This blog summarizes a panel from iPRES (International Conference on Digital Preservation) 2023 that discussed the carbon footprint of digital preservation.

- Pendergrass, Keith, et al. (2019), "Toward Environmentally Sustainable Digital Preservation," *The American Archivist*. "[The authors] propose explicitly integrating environmental sustainability into digital preservation practice by shifting cultural heritage professionals' paradigm of appraisal, permanence, and availability of digital content" (abstract).

- *Material Memory* podcast season 2: Climate Change & Cultural Memory. "Season two of Material Memory explores the impact of the climate crisis on communities and their cultural heritage."

Gender Equality in Archives

- D'Agostino, Maria, and Nicole Elias (2022), "Gender Equity Commission Priorities: An Archival Study and Prospects for the Future," *State and Local Government Review*. "This research explores the priorities of the gender equity commission in New York City over 45 years" (abstract).

- Engel, Laura, and Emily Ruth Rutter (2021), "Women and Archives," *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*. "[W]e must always remain mindful of the voices and innovations sewn into but, like invisible thread, unseen in the archives. Put another way, while archives offer scholars like us many affordances, they are also hindered by both epistemological and material limitations" (5).

- Rawson, K.J. (2018), "The Rhetorical Power of Archival Description: Classifying Images of Gender Transgression," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*. "This article examines three stages of the archival process—selection, organization, and labeling—by focusing on a handful of historical objects, held in two separate collections, that depict transgressive gender presentations" (abstract).

LGBTQIA+ Advocacy in Archives

- DeGraffenreid, Alexandra, and Gideon Goodrich (2023), "Improving Access and Discovery of LGBTQIA+ Materials Across Collection Services Workflows," *The Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*. "This article will discuss how a special collections library is improving the accessibility of their holdings relating to LGBTQIA+ histories" (abstract).

- Freeman, Elliot (2023), "Defying description: searching for queer history in institutional archives," *Archival Science*. "This paper considers how the lack of rich and explicit descriptive metadata shapes the (in)visibility and (in)accessibility of queer records within institutional archives" (abstract).

- Freeman, Elliot (2024), "Touches across time: queer as provenance," *Archival Science*. In considering the rights, roles, and needs of queer record users, I seek to articulate how their queer/ing uses of records continually and reflexively shape records throughout their becoming, in a potentially endless process of (re)interpretation, (re)description, and meaning making" (639).

Neurodivergent Perspectives in Archives

- Hoelscher, Colleen (2025), "Accessible Archival Instruction for Neurodivergent Students," in *Archives & Primary Sources Handbook*. "By adapting one's instruction to allow students greater flexibility in how they interact with primary source materials in the archival classroom, it is possible to foster a learning environment where all students benefit from increased accessibility" (1).

- Penniman, Sophie (2024), "Variegated Order: Making Space for Neurodiverse Perspectives in Archives," *The Journal of Contemporary Archival Studies*. "This article aims to envision how archives could better reflect and represent neurodivergent records creators—people whose brains function in ways that diverge significantly from dominant societal standards of 'normal'" (abstract).