Victoria Rincon

Professor Helene Williams

LIS Au 590

December 9th 2023

Reflection

For my directed fieldwork this fall, I dedicated my time to working with the Dioceses of Olympia for the Episcopalian Church. I would go to the Diocesan House every week and work with their archivist, Erik Bauer. At the beginning of this DFW, we established particular outcomes for the quarter. I was to learn how to process a part of the archival collection, gain experience using Preservica, and help identify and prioritize records that would go to St. Mark’s Cathedral. To successfully achieve each outcome, there were numerous tasks I would need to do. It included identifying items for processing and serving, creating a processing plan, arranging and describing the collection, and creating a finding aid. I also had to identify and upload files, add appropriate metadata, increase the findability of that metadata for the staff, and work with bulk updates. Lastly, I had to process collections at St. Marks by apprising/prioritizing their preservation needs and placing priority on records that have high intrinsic value.

Of these duties, the ones that were the most involved were the development of the processing plan and finding aid. Creating them was systematic, and everything I had done in one week would lead to what I would do the next. Everything led into each other. It began with me choosing a set of folders that I had to organize into two distinct groups, and based on their content over time, I had to create specific subfolders for them. What was originally four folders of mixed information became an organized and subdivided set of fourteen files. From there, I was able to create the processing plan, and it was that plan that helped me establish a working finding aid. I was also given the chance to work with Preservica, upload files on my own, and add metadata. It was an opportunity to see the more digital side of archival work.

Regarding IDEA issues and this DFW, the focus was on equity, best illustrated in the specific collection I worked on. The collection was a culmination of documents connected to the Church Assistance Fund, which was established in the late 1940s. At the time, smaller churches located further out in the dioceses, like in Aberdeen, Alma, or near Vancouver, were experiencing economic inequity. Because of their location and smaller congregations, they often had trouble maintaining or repairing the facilities around their parish or mission. This would be especially concerning if damage from a natural disaster such as a flood or earthquake were to occur.

Because these churches had no credit rating, they could not get loans from the bank, so the Church Assistance Fund was created. It would provide small funds created with some gifts from dozens of church members to make small loans to the small churches. It could give them money, grants, loans, and capital improvements to these places, but the fund could only be used exclusively for building improvements and for these missions and parishes that needed support from larger parts of the diocese. For instance, one church was able to create improvements to its foundations in case of an earthquake. Another was able to repair their roof and stop water from leaking in. Unfortunately, we learned that the Church Assistance Fund was officially dissolved in 1951, and its assets were absorbed into the Building and Loan Fund, a part of the Diocese Investment Fund. However, although it is defunct, the mission of the Church Assistance Fund lives on and continues in newer funds.

Going in, I felt my usual blend of nervousness and excitement; I had never worked in an archive before, and this DFW would be the first I would do in person. I wanted to make sure I made a good impression, and although I expected I would do fine, there was always the worry that I would make a mistake. Additionally, because I now had a physical location I needed to travel to, I took extra precautions to make sure I arrived on time. Despite my slight fear of the bus, I practiced going from school to the Diocesan House the week before the start of the quarter so I could get used to the route. Because of this, I created the habit of arriving on time, and if there was a chance I would arrive late, I would call ahead of time. Additionally, unlike my last remote fieldwork, I would be working alongside someone who would see my work and could immediately monitor my progress. Despite my nerves, having Mr. Bauer present was beneficial because I could get more immediate feedback if I had a question. In the end, not only did I feel as if I succeeded, but Mr. Bauer also made me aware that he was impressed with my work. The collection I worked on needed to be done and re-numbered, and in his eyes, I accomplished every goal that was expected from me.

This DFW tested my assessment and organizational skills. I am not particularly financially literate, nor do I have much business knowledge, so working with this particular collection was intimidating. However, to the best of my ability, I did my assessments based on the context clues I gathered from reading the documents in my folders to put everything in a cohesive order. Towards the end, when I was writing the organizational history for my finding aid, I was unsatisfied with saying that it was unknown as to why the Church Assistance Fund dissolved in 1974; however, after taking another look at the correspondences, I found that the Fund dissolved in 1951 instead and there was a reason why. The latest documents were correspondence between the IRS and James P. Hodges, one of the founders of the Church Assistance Fund, and in those letters, I found out what happened. Not only was I relieved to have figured out what happened on my last day, but it felt as if I solved a mystery. It was satisfying to leave the DFW without leaving anything unresolved; I was proud of myself.

This DFW helped me gain insight into what archival work is like and grow in my experience with handling fragile materials. Granted, the documents were not exceptionally old compared to some of the materials I have handled at my job at Preservation Services in the Suzzallo Library, but they still deserve to be handled with care. They may seem mundane to outsiders, but if my job has taught me anything, all documents are important to somebody and should be treated as such. I kept this in mind when gingerly removing staples and rusted paperclips from the papers, ensuring I did not cause further tearing. Currently, I am still considering archives as a career path, and I know that this DFW has been helpful to me and will continue to be moving forward. I can say now that I have archiving experience; I can take a body of work and organize it into series and subseries, make a processing plan, and make a finding aid. I have learned so much, and it is incredible that I now have those skills under my belt.

Honestly, this experience has pushed me to consider taking the archiving course in the spring or take on another archiving or collections DFW should it be possible to do so during my last quarter at UW. I hope I can because there is still much to learn about archiving. I think it also may have influenced my choice of capstone in some way because I am going to be working with the Seattle International Film Festival and their digital archive project. I’ll be working with their collection with my group partner, and I feel like I perhaps would not have come to that decision without doing this DFW and working with Erik Bauer, and for that, I will always be thankful.