

The Catholic Church Extension Society Records at Loyola University Chicago

Known today as the Extension Society, the Catholic Church Extension Society (CCES) was established on October 18, 1905, to “. . . foster and extend the Catholic Faith, to develop the missionary spirit in the clergy and people, to assist in the erection of parish buildings for needy places, to contribute to support of priests living in out-of-the-way localities and poverty-stricken districts . . .”¹ Founded by nineteen men — two archbishops, two bishops, nine priests, and six laymen² — the organization quickly grew from an idea with no funding to an organization providing a variety of assistance to poor parishes across the United States, Canada, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines. The extensive organizational records of CCES held at Loyola University Chicago Special Collections provide researchers with information on the history of CCES and its impact on parishes across the country and around the world as well as information on early twentieth-century Catholicism in the United States.

The Loyola University Chicago Special Collections received the CCES records on June 16, 1967, as a gift from the organization. This gift was authorized by then-General Secretary Rev. Joseph A. Cusack and initially consisted of 184 linear feet of records spanning the years 1905 through 1962 and containing general, historical, and diocesan correspondence; records concerning the Russian Apostolate; Montezuma Seminary; records and photographs regarding the Chapel Cars CCES ran during the early twentieth century; and information on wills and estates containing gifts to the organization. Since 1967 several additions have been made to the records, most notably a photograph collection containing over 10,000 items, a complete run of *Extension Magazine*, and applications for chapel-building funds. The CCES records now span the years 1905 to 2005 and comprise approximately 307 linear feet of materials, of which 148.5 linear feet are open to researchers. The remaining 158.5 linear feet, consisting mainly of general correspondence files, is being processed and will be made available as it is ready.

The three most requested sections of the CCES records are the photograph collection, Chapel Car logs, and diocesan correspondence. These have been used by historians interested in Catholicism in the United States, parish historians, genealogists, and railroad historians, among others, for books and articles. The CCES Photograph Collection stretches from the years 1904 to 1996, although the majority of the photographs are from the early twentieth century, providing researchers with a glimpse of the people, chapels, and towns served by the Extension Society, events the organization participated in and was affected by, and some of the people who worked for the organization in the early years. The majority of the collection covers the United States, with both states and territories represented, but also includes photographs from other countries where the Extension Society has been active, including Panama, Guam, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Canada, and countries in Europe. These photographs provide a unique look at a town or the beginning of a parish and may include information on the local priest, missionaries, parishioners, and the town itself. The chapel



Figure 1. Construction of Sacred Heart Church, Ausley, Nebraska. Undated. (Courtesy of Loyola University Chicago Special Collections.)

¹ Catholic Church Extension Society, *Constitution and By-Laws of the Catholic Church Extension Society, 1912*, Catholic Church Extension Society records, Subgroup 1: History, Series 2: Rev. Francis Clement Kelley records, Box 1, Folder 17, Loyola University Chicago Archives & Special Collections, Chicago.

² Very Rev. Francis C. Kelley, D.D., *The Story of Church Extension*. 1913, Catholic Church Extension Society records, Subgroup 1: History, Series 2: Rev. Francis Clement Kelley records, Box 1, Folder 17, Loyola University Chicago Archives & Special Collections, Chicago.



Figure 2. Line of visitors to the Chapel Car St. Anthony, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. October 26, 1908. (Courtesy of Loyola University Chicago Special Collections.)

car, motor car, chapel wagon, and chapel boat sections of the collection provide a look at the unique ways CCES brought missions to underserved areas.

The Chapel Car logs are a wonderful source of social-economic, Catholic, and American history that is frequently consulted by researchers. Spanning the years 1907 to 1921, the logs usually begin with general information on where the chapel cars were visiting, how many missions were given, how many Masses were said, and how many people attended. As they progress, however, the priests writing the logs begin to include descriptions of the towns they visited and the countryside

they travelled through as well as detailed information on baptisms, confirmations, first communions, and marriages or marriage renewals they performed. At times information on conversations or debates with representatives of other religions are detailed. Several of these logs also include information on how the railroad strikes of the early twentieth century and government regulation of railroads during World War I affected the work of the CCES. The Chapel Car photographs augment the logs by showing various towns the Chapel Cars visited and the people they served.

The third most requested section of the CCES records is the 47 linear feet of diocesan correspondence. This section spans the years 1906 to 1962 and includes correspondence between CCES and dioceses from the United States, Canada, the Caribbean, Central America, and countries in the Pacific. While most of the correspondence deals with routine requests from parishes or bishops, some letters between various bishops and the president of CCES (mainly to Rev. William D. O'Brien, D.D., president of CCES from 1925 to 1962) include information on the town, state, or region the writer is representing. Still other letters include information on notable events, as shown in the December 31, 1941, letter from the Bishop of Monterey-Fresno (California) to Rev. O'Brien, where he states: "They had my whole Diocese on the coast blockaded with their submarines and you know how peace loving we always have been over here."³ In addition correspondents often included information on priests and other people they knew in common or on the administration and events of CCES.

Loyola University Chicago Special Collections continues to work on making the CCES records more available to researchers by digitizing selected parts of the collection. To date 244 items have been digitized, including all the Chapel Car logs, which are augmented by digitized versions of a portion of the Chapel Car, Chapel Boat, and Motor Chapel photographs. At the moment only a small selection of photographs featuring parishes and parishioners from the early twentieth century in Alabama, Alaska, American Samoa, Arizona, Illinois, Montana, Nebraska, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, and Texas, as well as photographs of the first board of governors and president of CCES, have been digitized. This is a project, however, that archives staff continues to work on as time and resources permit. All digitized items, as well as catalog records for the CCES records, are available through both the Catholic Research Resource Alliance Portal (<http://www.catholicresearch.net/>) and the Loyola University Chicago Archives & Special Collections website (<http://www.luc.edu/archives/>). All researchers are welcome to use the Catholic Church Extension Society records at the Loyola University Chicago Archives & Special Collections.

³ Bishop of Monterey-Fresno, Letter to Most Rev. William D. O'Brien, D.D., Dec. 31, 1941, Catholic Church Extension Society Records, Subgroup 3: Diocesan Correspondence, Series 1: United States, Box 41, Folder 8, Loyola University Chicago Archives & Special Collections, Chicago.