

Bishop Ronald G. Connors, C.Ss.R. Papers

Baltimore Province of the Redemptorists Archives
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The scope of the papers of Bishop Ronald G. Connors, C.Ss.R., a member of the Baltimore Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, encompasses letters, manuscripts (including a lengthy memoir), notebooks, articles, news clippings, audio recordings, ecclesiastical paraphernalia, and photographs, dating from c. 1904 to 2002, the year of his death. The collection is especially important—however partial—for research on the history of the Catholic Church in the Dominican Republic. Of particular interest are the numbers of items related to the condition of the poor, which the Bishop articulated in his notebooks. The entirety of the collection is open to qualified researchers, though a caution is given herewith relative to somewhat indelicate materials found in one folder. Consultation of these materials will be at the discretion of the Province Archivist.

Biography:

Ronald Gerard Connors was born in Brooklyn, New York, on November 1, 1915 to William J. and Gertrude (néé Lundrigan) Connors, two émigrés from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia. His siblings included Alfred F. and Mary G. (Burke) Connors, and a brother who pre-deceased them, a Redemptorist confrere, Father William J. Connors, C.Ss.R. (d. 1974). The sacraments of initiation were all taken in Our Lady of Perpetual Help Parish, Brooklyn, New York, beginning with his baptism on November 14, 1915. He went through the primary grades at OLPH and, having been taught by Sisters of St. Joseph and having pious parents, a priestly vocation was cultivated. Also, piano playing. He took lessons from the third to eighth grade and developed sufficient talent to later influence his assignments as a missionary priest in Puerto Rico, where there was need of someone to play the organ or piano. He entered the juvenate at St. Mary's, North East, Pennsylvania, in 1929. He was temporarily professed August 2, 1936, at Ilchester, Maryland and made perpetual vows on September 2, 1939, at Mt. St. Alphonsus in Esopus, New York. From 1936 to 1942 he was in seminary in Esopus and was ordained there on June 22, 1941 by Bishop Stephen Donahue, the Auxiliary Bishop of New York.

His second novitiate was spent at Annapolis, Maryland, between August and December 1942 (compressed because of the war) and from December of 1942 to September 1943, he did parochial work at Sacred Heart Parish in Baltimore. He returned to Ilchester as socius in 1943 to March 1944, whereupon he returned to Annapolis to do military chaplaincy until August 1946, alongside Father Francis X. Murphy, C.Ss.R. "He had the officers and I had the enlisted men," Connors later recalled. Connors' parochial powers at this juncture were extended to those in the Seven Rivers Command, Annapolis, by order of Archbishop Francis Spellman, who was the Military Vicar during the Second World War. From 1946 until 1950 was stationed at San Lorenzo, Puerto Rico. Between 1950 and 1956 he was engaged in pastoral work at Las Matas de Farfán, Dominican Republic, and served as rector from 1953-1956. From 1956 to 1959 he was stationed at La Candelaría, Mayaguez, Puerto Rico. He returned to San Lorenzo in 1959, but remained there only until 1960 when he was elected Vice-Provincial of the Vice-Province of San Juan. With this assignment, he took up residence at Puerta de Tierra. Between 1964 and 1969 he was Provincial Superior of the Congregation's Baltimore Province and was instrumental in building the Shore Road residence in Brooklyn, which he occupied in the last year of his tenure as Provincial. He was *vocalis iure officii* to the 16th and 17th General Chapter of the Congregation in 1963 and 1967, respectively. His two successive assignments found him again serving as superior: for

Immaculate Conception Parish in the Bronx between 1969 and 1972 and later at St. Clement's, Saratoga Springs, New York from 1972 to 1976.

It was during the nation's bicentennial year that Connors was elected Titular Bishop of Equizeto on April 24, 1976. He was ordained as Coadjutor Bishop with the right of succession to the See of San Juan de La Maguana in the Cathedral of San Juan Bautista in the Dominican Republic. He was consecrated by Octavio Cardinal Rojas; Bishops Edwin Broderick of Albany and Thomas F. Reilly, whom Connors succeeded, served as co-consecrators on July 20, 1976. Connors took as his motto (in Spanish) "Apacienta Mis Ovejas" which translates as the Christic injunction: "Feed My Sheep." Exactly one year later he became ordinary of that See. He retired in 1991, whereupon he became Bishop Emeritus. He was succeeded by Bishop José Dolores Grullón Estrella. Though retired, Bishop Connors took an active part in the apostolic journey of Pope John Paul II to Santo Domingo to celebrate the five hundredth anniversary of the Christian presence in the Americas.

At the time he became Ordinary, San Juan de la Maguana was already established as a diocese, having been converted from a prelatore nullius November 21, 1969. When he succeeded Bishop Reilly, however, the territory that once covered 14, 235 square kilometers (8845 square miles) and contained over 704,000 (of whom 651,000 were Catholic) was split and half went to the newly erected Diocese of Barahona. San Juan de la Maguana had 22 parishes and 8 chapels, according to the *Anuario Pontificio* for 1977. The Diocese of San Juan de la Maguana then had a territory of 7,478 square kilometers (4,647 square miles) containing an overall population of around 465,000, of whom some 420,000 were Catholic. Although there was a slight increase in the number of diocesan priests ordained during his tenure, nearly every other category of spiritual involvement showed a decline. Decreases in the numbers of men and women religious meant the closing or modification of parishes and schools. The number of charitable institutes, however, rose significantly during Connor's episcopate, including the establishment of "Cooperadores" who were Spanish transplants who would instruct the people in the Catechism and do youth work in the countryside. He also added a group of contemplative nuns from Spain, the Clarisas Capuchinas, who soon took in Dominican natives. Also, through the largesse of the German Catholic aid agency Adveniat, the diocese was able to dig 60 new wells, 4,000 latrines, and housing for the poor.

Bishop Connors returned to Brooklyn later in life, taking up residence again at Our Lady of Perpetual Help. He continued his practice of helping with confirmations in the Diocese of Rockville Center, where he often stayed with his sister Mary. He died November 27, 2002, at his sister's home in Long Island. A Mass of Christian Burial took place December 2, 2002 from the Basilica of Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Brooklyn. It was Bishop Connor's desire to be buried next to his predecessor, Bishop Thomas Reilly, C.Ss.R., in the Cathedral of San Juan de La Maguana. His remains were translated there for interment.

Acquisition and Processing Information:

The Bishop Ronald G. Connors, C.Ss.R., Papers were given as a permanent legacy to the Baltimore Province Archives, where they are maintained. The collection was accessioned after Bishop Connor's death by then archivist, Father Carl Hoegerl, C.SsR. It was not until September 2009, however, that Patrick Hayes, Ph.D., began to process the materials. This finding aid was begun by Dr. Hayes in September 2009 in Microsoft Word.

Adjunct collections:

Provincial Files: Connors, Cabinet 72 C; personnel file (alpha), Cabinet 6 A. Additionally, there are boxed materials above cabinet 53 (four boxes). These boxes contain the following items:

- Box 1: EPC, 1975
Province, 1964, 1966, 1968
General Chapter September 8, 1967, 1st Session
Diary 1931, 1950-1951
Appointment book, December 1944-December 1945
Address books (2)
Calendars, 1990-1995
- Box 2: Appointment books, 1960-1969
- Box 3: Appointment books, 1970-1979
- Box 4: Appointment books, 1980-1989

Languages:

Materials are in English, Spanish, and Latin.

Bibliography:

"Bishop Connors, voice of the poor, dies at 87," *C.S.R. Chronicle* (December 2002): 4-5.

Bishop Ronald F. Connors, "Hurricane David Devastates the Dominican Republic," *Saratoga Living* (January 9-23, 1980): 8-14

Scope and Contents:

The Connors Papers partly comprise in part one cabinet drawer (54A) and are divided into several folders. After one file folder of biographical information, subsequent subject file folders are listed alphabetically by title in the order of appearance in the collection. The collection itself is concentrated mainly on his episcopacy and the several projects and personalities with whom he had frequent or notable contact. The files relate personal and public information relative to his ministries and include letters from cardinals and confreres. One folder marked "Honors-Memberships-Misc." contains a page of Spanish terms of a sexual nature and should be viewed with proper discretion. Permission to examine this folder should be obtained by the Province Archivist. Among the notable features of this collection is the lengthy manuscript of a memoir of Bishop Connors' activities in the DR, together with several notebooks filled with candid reflections on his life and ministry there, particularly in describing the plight of the people in his care.

Detailed Finding Aid

Cabinet 54A

- Folder 1: Biographical Information
- Folder 2: Correspondence
- Folder 3: Diocese of San Juan de la Maguana
- Folder 4: Episcopacy
- Folder 5: Golden Jubilee of Priesthood
- Folder 6: Honors – Memberships – Misc.
- Folder 7: Mementos (including childhood autograph book, Knights of Columbus ribbons, purificators from the ordinations the Connors brothers, a pectoral cross, and rosary)
- Folder 8: Memoir of Dominican Republic
- Folder 9: News Clippings
- Folder 10: Notebooks/Calendars (1991-2000; three notebooks)

Folder 11: Photographs (four envelopes)
Folder 12: Redemptorist Affairs
Folder 13: Sermons/Writings

Last updated: September 22, 2009/pjh