

# Researching Catholic Ancestors

## *Class 5: Researching Nuns and Clergy*

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### Key Terms

- **Archdiocese** - the chief diocese of an ecclesiastical province overseen by an archbishop
- **Bishop** - the highest order of ordained ministry in Catholic teaching
- **Clergy** - formal leaders within established religions that preside over specific rituals and teach the religion's doctrines and practices
- **Diocese** – the district under the jurisdiction of a bishop
- **Ordination** – the act of conferring holy orders on someone, including the ability to perform various religious rites and ceremonies
- **Parish** – a specific community within a diocese

### Methodology

1. Identify the clergy in your family
  - a. Go-to records include census records, city directories, newspaper articles, and cemetery records.
  - b. Nuns typically changed their names. Keep this in mind when searching in the census and other records.
2. Identify the parish church
  - a. City directories have sections that outline the different religious organizations including a list of churches, synagogues, etc. Names of clergy may be included.
  - b. Town and county histories include brief sketches on local clergy and church histories
  - c. Religious directories detail the clergy associated with a particular diocese as well as other notes including if clergy are retired, transferred to another parish, etc.
    - i. Example: Hoffmann's Catholic Directory
3. Contact the church and religious archives
  - a. Holy Orders/Ordination can be found in the archdiocese where ordained or at the parish they served in
    - i. For specific orders of priests and nuns, contact the provincial or national houses of the order
  - b. Parish Council/Committee Minutes – business meeting minutes, which concern changes in staff, repairs to the building, issues within the congregation

- c. Manuscripts
  - i. Diocese account books
  - ii. Memories about clergy
  - iii. Clergy's personal and family papers
  - iv. Correspondence
  - v. Newspaper clippings
  - vi. Diaries
4. Conduct research using a wide variety of records:
  - a. Vital Records
  - b. Church records
  - c. School records
    - i. Seminary records may include transcripts of family member's education
    - ii. Yearbook photographs
    - iii. School newspaper articles
  - d. Newspapers
  - e. Archives
    - i. Licenses issued by parish – provided to vital records office and may be available in city archives
  - f. Military Records – many clergy served as war chaplains
    - i. U.S. War Chaplains - <https://www.loc.gov/vets/stories/ex-war-chaplains.html> - includes memoirs and video interviews for war chaplains that served in many different wars since WWII
    - ii. *Father Duffy's Story* - <https://archive.org/details/fatherduffysstor01duff>
    - iii. WWI Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) Records - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/personnel-records.aspx>
    - iv. WWI War Diaries (Canada) - <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/Pages/war-diaries.aspx>

## Methodology

- Boston, MA: St. Augustine Cemetery Records, 1819-1859 - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databaserecord/2766/boston-ma-st-augustine-cemetery-records-1819-1859>
- Massachusetts: Catholic Cemetery Association Records, 1833-1940 - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databaserecord/2782/massachusetts-catholic-cemetery-association-records-1833-1940>

- Massachusetts: Roman Catholic Parish Cemetery Records - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2811/massachusetts-roman-catholic-parish-cemetery-records>
- Watertown, MA: Catholic Mount Auburn Cemetery Burials, 1854-1980 - <https://www.americanancestors.org/search/databasesearch/2789/watertown-ma-catholic-mount-auburn-cemetery-burials-1854-1980>

## Publications

Belmonte, Jeanne. *Using Catholic Records*. (Boston, New England Historic Genealogical Society, 2017) - Call No. CS9 .P676 no. 8

Humling, Virginia. *U.S. Catholic Sources: A Diocesan Research Guide*. (Salt Lake City, Ancestry, 1995)

Morton, Sunny Jane and Harold A. Henderson. *How to Find Your Family History in U.S. Church Records: A Genealogist's Guide: With Specific Resources for Major Christian Denominations before 1900* (Baltimore, Maryland, Genealogical Publishing Co., Inc., 2019)

O'Toole, James M. "Catholic Church Records: A Genealogical and Historical Resource." *The New England Historical and Genealogical Register* 132 (1978)

O'Toole, James M. *Guide to the Archives of the Archdiocese of Boston*. (New York, Garland Pub, 1982)

Quintin, Robert J. *Genealogical guide to the Catholic churches of New England*. (Pawtucket, RI, 1994)

Raymond, Stuart. *Tracing Your Roman Catholic Ancestors: A Guide for Family and Local Historians* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire, Pen & Sword Books, 2018)

## Websites

American Ancestors – [www.americanancestors.org](http://www.americanancestors.org)

American Ancestors' Catholic Records Project - <https://catholicrecords.americanancestors.org>

Ancient Order of Hibernians – <https://aoh.com>

Archdiocese of Boston – [www.bostoncatholic.org](http://www.bostoncatholic.org)

**Archdiocese of New York** – <https://www.archny.org>

**ArchiveGrid** - <https://researchworks.oclc.org/archivegrid/>

**Archives West** - <https://archiveswest.orbiscascade.org>

**Burke Library at Union Theological Seminary** – <https://library.columbia.edu/libraries/burke.html>

**Calvary & Allied Cemeteries** - <https://calvaryandalliedcemeteries.com>

**Catholic News Archive** – <https://thecatholicnewsarchive.org>

**Catholic Order of Foresters** – <https://www.catholicforester.org>

**Catholic Research Resources Alliance** – <https://www.catholicresearch.org/directory-of-catholic-newspapers-online>

**FamilySearch** - [www.familysearch.org](http://www.familysearch.org)

**Findmypast Catholic Heritage Archive** - <https://www.findmypast.com/page/catholic-records>

**Internet Archive** – <https://www.archive.org>

**Jesuit Archives & Research Center** – <https://jesuitarchives.org>

**Mount Calvary Cemetery (Manchester, New Hampshire)** – <http://www.mountcalvarycemetery.org>

**Sisters of Mercy of the Americas** – <https://www.sistersofmercy.org>

**UMass Boston** - <https://www.umb.edu>

**United States Conference of Catholic Bishops** - <http://www.usccb.org/>