



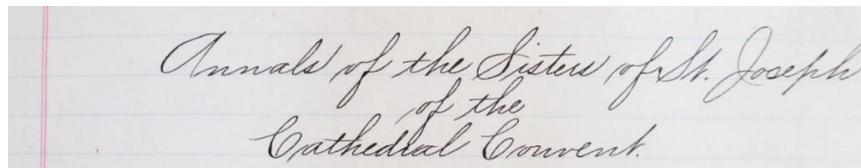
ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

April 2021

Stories of the Pandemic Cathedral Convent Annals, 1912-1934

First-hand accounts of historical events with similarities to current times can give us a sense that people of the past walk in solidarity with us. Often we hear of the parallels between the Covid-19 pandemic and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic. One account of the 1918 pandemic is found in the Annals of Cathedral Convent, which recorded the daily life of Sisters of Saint Joseph missioned to the Cathedral of the Holy Cross in Boston. These Annals, scribed by the sisters, create a context for the lived experience of the pandemic. **In many ways, we have lived it too.**

Following is an archival reflection to be read back and forth similar to the Liturgy of the Hours or other modes of responsive prayer. Summaries of the Annals' narratives (below, on the left side) can guide us in reflection on our own times (**in blue**). The 1912-1934 Annals set the scene:



Mother Regis Casserly had just died in October, 1917. The sisters mourned the foundress of their Congregation, who spent 44 years growing and developing their community in Boston.

There was grief before the virus, unforgotten during the pandemic. May we be unafraid to continue things we had to put on hold.

The following February, in 1918, the Spanish Flu had begun to spread worldwide. The Cathedral Convent Annals annotating the month of April cite the death of a 27-year old sister, a mark of the trend of high mortality rates in individuals 20-40¹ years of age.

The disease targeted certain age groups, a quality of viruses that we cannot control and that can make us feel powerless. Let this make us more mindful of the needs of the most vulnerable.

¹ 1918 pandemic (h1n1 virus). Center for Disease Control. (2019, March 20). Retrieved March 31, 2021, from <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/1918-pandemic-h1n1.html>



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In June, the Cathedral hosted Commencement exercises for the graduating class of 1918.

Life, and many of its milestones, continued on! May we absorb these joys so they carry us through difficult times, and always find reasons, even if little, to celebrate.

The following school year, there was a month-long recess from classes because of the influenza.

May we encourage each other to reassess our priorities and change our routines to protect public health and the common good... even when the pandemic resides.

Fifteen Boston CSJ sisters died between 1918 and 1920. At least nine of those sisters are confirmed to have died from the flu, each of them in their 20s and 30s.

The number of those who died in the pandemic is tragic and heartbreaking. We are reminded that each number represents a real human being, a person loved and missed by many others. We pray for them, and for those who loved them.



Photograph of Cathedral Convent from the Annals

Of those Boston CSJ sisters who had died, three had been missioned to the Cathedral Convent: Sr. Mary Rose O'Toole, Sr. Damien Walker and Sr. St. Bernard Driscoll. Their funerals remained private due to the pandemic.

We have had to delay customs which we normally rely on to help us heal from grief. We pray that we find peace in our hearts, no matter the restrictions.



ARTIFACT OF THE MONTH

April 2021

Statistics of Catholic sister-volunteers, 1918.
Newspaper unknown.

Despite the risk to their own health, many Catholic sisters volunteered as nurses, even spending time in private homes to aid families who were sick – caring for the sick, cooking, washing laundry and cleaning homes. One CSJ sister attended to a Hyde Park family whose father had died from the flu, leaving behind eight other family members sick and helpless.

SUMMARIZED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES AND CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS OF THE DIOCESE
Nov. 16, 1918

Working in Conjunction with the Diocesan Charitable Bureau During the Recent Influenza Epidemic.

No. of Sister engaged in visiting sick in their homes...	772
No. of Sisters nursing the sick in Emergency Hospitals.	175
No. of families assisted in their homes by Sisters	2618
No. of Lay-visitors assisting Sisters in their work	375
No. of visits made to families by Sisters	13982
No. of days Sisters spent nursing in Emer. Hospitals.	556
No. of Canteens or Nourishment Stations in Diocese	72
No. of persons to whom nourishment was brought	9191
No. of persons to whom supplies, (clothing, etc.) were brought	1466
No. of Sisterhoods that volunteered services	20
No. of Communities of these Sisterhoods	91
No. of Cities and Towns in which Sisters nursed in sick families	25

We bless those who unselfishly committed themselves to the care of others. Nurses and hospital workers, first responders, food pantry workers, volunteers, neighbors, countless others.

Newspaper articles pasted into the Annals commemorate the visit of King Albert and Queen Elizabeth of Belgium in October of 1919, almost a year after the ending of World War I. The royals were hosted in Boston for a mass said by William Cardinal O’Connell.



The pandemic was not our only experience this year. Other events took place (political, personal, communal). Let us acknowledge these events and preserve their lessons for generations to come.

Newspaper articles pasted into the Annals show the King and Queen of Belgium.