



The following is the finding aid for the Archbishop Sebastian Messmer collection located at the Archdiocese of Milwaukee Archives. A finding aid is a catalog tool used in archives that briefly describes the material found in a collection. These records are not available digitally.
[Researchers must make an appointment with an archivist to view the material.](#)

Sebastian Gebhart Messmer, 1847-1930
Papers, 1875-1930, bulk 1900-1930
MC 33

Volume
2.25 cubic feet

Access
Open/unrestricted

Scope and Content *a brief description of the types of materials in the collection.*

The collection of Sebastian Gebhart Messmer (1847-1930), fourth archbishop of Milwaukee (1903-1930), contains biographical information; correspondence (1884-1930); circular letters (1901-1930); legal matters; liturgical notebooks; sermons; death/funeral materials (condolence letters, newspaper clippings, resolutions and tributes, funeral sermon); passport papers and documents of membership in societies. Most of the collection is in English with some correspondence and notes in German and Latin

The records in this collection relate directly to Archbishop Messmer. Additional records from the time period when he was in office may be located in other collections. Consult an archivist for details.

Biographical Note

Sebastian Gebhard Messmer was born on August 29, 1847, in Goldach, Switzerland and was the last European-born Archbishop of Milwaukee. Messmer studied at the University of Innsbruck, Austria, and was ordained a priest on July 23, 1871, in Innsbruck. He came to the United States to serve on the faculty of Seton Hall College in South Orange, New Jersey in the Newark diocese.

Messmer obtained a doctorate in Canon Law in Rome before his nomination in 1891 to succeed Bishop Katzer as the Bishop of Green Bay. He served there for nearly 13 years until he was appointed to succeed Katzer again, this time as archbishop of Milwaukee on November 28, 1903.

Once again the question of Catholic ethnicity in Milwaukee arose, however Messmer softened his former devotion to ethnicity and instead became a proponent of smoothing over ethnic differences with his centralizing policies. He became associated with the American Federation of Catholic Societies, a group seeking to present American society with a united front on Catholic issues.

In order to centralize authority in the Church, he wrote the first Handbook for Catholic Parishioners in 1907 to establish guidelines for diverse ethnic groups in the diocese. As the Polish community in the diocese swelled and insisted on maintaining its distinctive Church life, Messmer became involved in a heated debate with Fr. Wenceslaus Kruszka, a Polish priest, which nearly created a serious schism in the Milwaukee Church.

Under Messmer, Milwaukee received its first two auxiliary bishops. Bishop Joseph Koudelka came to Milwaukee in 1911 and served until he was transferred to Superior, Wisconsin, in 1913. Bishop Edward Kozlowski was consecrated auxiliary bishop in 1914, and died suddenly only having served a year. During Messmer's time, 29 more orders of religious men and women were also established in the archdiocese.

Known as the “archbishop of Christian charity,” Messmer personally contributed a sizable amount of the funds for a charitable bureau that he created in 1916. The bureau drew the various child protective organizations in the diocese under a central administration. Charitable institutions for the sick, orphaned, poor and aged more than doubled during Messmer’s administration. He also played a significant role in education, as Messmer High School was built and 40 more schools were added to the Catholic school system. He also appointed Fr. Joseph Barbian as the first superintendent of schools and reinvigorated the school board. During his time, Messmer saw the establishment of Mount Mary College and Marquette College’s change in status to Marquette University.

Messmer approved the first ministry to African-Americans when a Catholic couple, Lincoln C. and Julia Valle, organized St. Benedict the Moor church and school in 1909. He also supported the establishment of Our Lady of Guadalupe Mission for Mexican Catholics, which was founded on December 12, 1929. Though he opposed women’s suffrage, he favored the formation of Catholic women’s organizations, such as the Marquette Women’s League and the Milwaukee Archdiocesan Council of Catholic Women. He also started and encouraged many lay organizations, including the Archdiocesan Union of the Holy Name Society, the Federation of American Catholic Societies, the Western Catholic Summer School, the Knights of Columbus and a revived St. Vincent De Paul Society.

Archbishop Messmer also founded the Catholic Herald in 1922, the official Catholic, non-partisan, English-language paper of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. He died on August 4, 1930, while visiting his beloved native Switzerland and was buried there in Goldach. His motto was: *In Ubertate Terrae*. "In the Richness of the Earth"

Box and Folder List *This is a list of folders names within the collection. The folders have been arranged alphabetically. “B” is an abbreviation for box and “F” is an abbreviation for folder. This list will help the researcher narrow down exactly what folder they want to look at.*

Box	Folder	Folder Title
B 1	F 1	Biographical Information
B 1	F 2	Burial Place
B 1	F 3	Cathedraticum Controversy, 1918-1920
B 1	F 4	Church Music, Meetings and Correspondence, 1905-1906
B 1	F 5	Circular Letters, 1901-1917
B 1	F 6	Circular Letters, 1918-1930
B 1	F 7	Confirmations and List of Priests
B 1	F 8	Correspondence, n.d., 1884-1906
B 2	F 1	Correspondence, 1907-1915
B 2	F 2	Correspondence, 1916-1930
B 2	F 3	Day Book, 1904-1908
B 2	F 4	Day Book, 1908-1930
B 2	F 5	Death, Announcements, 1930
B 2	F 6	Death, Correspondence, 1930-1932
B 2	F 7	Death, Newspaper Clippings, 1930
B 2	F 8	Death, Resolutions and Tributes, 1930

Box	Folder	Folder Title
B 2	F 9	Death, Sermons, 1930
B 3	F 1	Deutsche Liga der Freien Wohlfahrtspflege, 1928-1929
B 3	F 2	Documents, 1862-1921
B 3	F 3	Documents, Memberships, 1896-1917
B 3	F 4	Documents, Passports, 1871-1914
B 3	F 5	Eightieth Birthday, 1927
B 3	F 6	External Order and Arrangement Notes, undated
B 3	F 7	Golden Jubilee, 1921
B 3	F 8	Jungblut Case, Correspondence, 1904
B 3	F 9	Legal Matters, 1917-1928
B 3	F 10	Library Catalog, 1879
B 3	F 11	Liturgical Notebooks, 1873-1877
B 3	F 12	Manuscript, "Costumes and Dress (Rules, etc.)" n.d.
B 3	F 13	Memorandum/Notebooks
B 3	F 14	Minutes, Conference on Ecclesiastical Studies held in Buffalo, NY, 1885
B 3	F 15	Miscellaneous
B 3	F 16	Newspaper Clippings, n.d., 1892-1930
B 4	F 1	Nomination of Bishop, 1914
B 4	F 2	Notes, unknown, 1875-1900
B 4	F 3	Pastoral Instruction on Christian Marriage, 1905
B 4	F 4	Pastoral Letter on Christian Marriage, 1924
B 4	F 5	Report to the Commissio Pontifica Legibus Canonicis in Unum Redigendis, 1913
B 4	F 6-7	Research, Florimond J. Bonduel
B 4	F 8	Roman Faculties, 1871-1929
B 4	F 9	Sermon, "The Dignity of the Catholic Priesthood," 1924
B 4	F 10	Sermons, n.d., 1887
B 4		Scrapbook, 1892-1896 (bound)
B 5	F 1	Sermons, 1873-1879
B 5	F 2	Sermons and Talks, n.d., 1877-1912
B 5	F 3-4	Sermons and Talks, Drafts and notes
B 5	F 5	Silver Jubilee, Program 1929
B 5	F 6	Teaching Materials, Liturgics, 1887-1888
B 5	F 7	Teaching Materials - Canon Law, 1890-1892
B 5	F 8	Thesaurus Breviarie Romani, pre-1900
B 5	F 9	Travel Account, 1930
B 5	F 10	Will and Estate
B 5	F 11	Writings, Drafts