

Bishop Bernard Joseph Nolker, C.Ss.R., Papers

Redemptorists Archives of the Baltimore Province
c/o St. Peter the Apostle
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The scope of the papers of Bishop Bernard J. Nolker, C.Ss.R., a member of the Baltimore Province of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer, encompasses his personnel files, letters, reports, news clippings, and photographs. The materials date from 1928 to his death in 2000. The collection is especially important—however partial—for research on the episcopal history of the Catholic Church in Brazil, especially in the 1960s through the 1980s. The entirety of the collection is open to qualified researchers, with the exception of the marriage subject file, which is restricted. Consultation of these materials will be at the discretion of the Province Archivist.

Biography:

Bernard Joseph “Ben” Nolker was born September 25, 1912, in Baltimore, Maryland. He was the son of Frederick J. and Mary E. (née Yake) Nolker. The boy was baptized in St. Thomas Aquinas Parish, Baltimore, on October 6, 1912, where he was also schooled, and confirmed there on January 13, 1924. Still, it was at St. James Church, where he made his first holy communion, that Nolker felt the call to ministry, principally through the encouragement of Fathers Alfred Menth, C.Ss.R. and Francis Bader, C.Ss.R. He entered St. Mary’s High School at North East, Pennsylvania in 1927 and remained until 1933, the same year as his mother’s death. He made his temporary profession as a Redemptorist August 2, 1934, at Ilchester and his perpetual vows September 2, 1937 at Mt. St. Alphonsus, Esopus, New York. At Esopus he pursued theological studies from 1934-1940 and was ordained to the priesthood on June 18, 1939 by Bishop Stephen Donahue of New York. His second novitiate was pursued at St. Mary’s, Annapolis, Maryland, between September 1940 and March 1941, whereupon he was assigned to the Vice-Province of Campo-Grande, Brazil.

Nolker served in the following locations: Ponta Grossa I (1941-1943); Tibagi (1943-1946); Telemaco Borba (September-December 1946); Bela Vista (1946-1947); Ponta Pora (superior, 1947 to 1950, with the Parish of Mato Grosso, which was twice the size of the State of Maryland); Paranaguá I (superior, 1950-1956); Ponta Grossa II (Seminary of the Holy Redeemer; superior, 1956-1961); Paranaguá I (superior, 1961-1963). For most of these assignments, he logged about a thousand miles a year on horseback, visiting remote parts of these far-flung parishes. In 1943, for instance, the Redemptorists of the area of Tibagi baptized 2,200 children. Snakes and spiritism, fleas and saddle sores—Nolker braved them all. He worked for twenty-one years on the mission in Brazil, until January 7, 1963, when he was elected to the newly erected See of Paranaguá (July 21, 1962, per bull “Ecclesia Santa” of Pope John XXIII). He was consecrated a bishop on April 25, 1963 in the Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Baltimore, by the ordinary, Archbishop (later Cardinal) Lawrence J. Shehan. Co-consecrators were Bishop Edward Harper, C.Ss.R. and Archbishop Manuel da Silveira D’Elboux of Brazil.

When he began his episcopate, he had charge of the pastoral care of approximately 150,000 souls who were cared for by nine priests (seven Redemptorists, one Capuchin, one secular). The territory amounted to about 8,000 square miles. In 1967, the bishop received a Jeep. Two decades later there were 23 priests and 43 women religious, and a minor seminary. Nolker retired in 1989 and returned to the United States and took up residence in the Redemptorist community at Sacred Heart of Jesus Parish,

Baltimore. The last several years of his life were marked by declining health, including the inability to write. Bishop Nolker died on January 17, 2000, aged 87, and was buried from Sacred Heart Church, Baltimore, Maryland, January 22, 2000. Cardinal William Keeler was the main celebrant. Bishop Nolker survived his two siblings, Marie Nolker and Irene Nolker Dalton, but left several great nieces and great nephews, a brother-in-law, Joseph Dalton, and his son, Fred.

Acquisition and Processing Information:

The Bishop Bernard Nolker, C.Ss.R., Papers were given as a permanent legacy to the Baltimore Province Archives, where they are maintained. The collection was accessioned during Bishop Nolker's lifetime by then archivist, Father Carl Hoegerl, C.Ss.R. Upon his death in 2000, the papers were accessioned for processing by the Archives. It was not until July 2009, however, that Patrick Hayes, Ph.D., began to process the materials. This finding aid was begun by Dr. Hayes in July 2009 in Microsoft Word and supplemented by him in February 2018, after a permanent gift of mementos from Bishop Nolker's estate bequeathed by his nephew, Mr. Fred Dalton of Ellicott City, Maryland.

Related collections:

Vice-Province of Campo-Grande, Brazil

Languages

Materials are in English and Portuguese.

Scope and Contents:

The Nolker Papers comprise roughly six boxes. They contain biographical material; correspondence by date; news clippings related to his consecration and episcopate; mementos in various media; and photographs. Also, among these folders is the episcopal seal of the Diocese of Paranaguá, contacts from his Rolodex, and one cassette tape. The photo albums depict the life of a missionary from the first voyage into the tropics to the several milestones he passed. A large cache of mission appeal letters speaks of life in the Diocese of Paranaguá from 1966 to 1989, providing a rich and sustained discourse on a post-Vatican II diocese.

Detailed Finding Aid

Collection: Bishops papers, Most Rev. Bernard J. Nolker Papers

Box 1

- Folder 1: Biographical Material / Finding aid
- Folder 2: Books/Pamphlets
- Folder 3: Check/Account Books
- Folder 4: Circular Letters
- Folder 5: Correspondence, 1949-1989
- Folder 6: Correspondence, 1991-2000
- Folder 7: Diaries
- Folder 8: Diocese of Paranaguá
- Folder 9: Honors
- Folder 10: Marriage cases (restricted)

Box 2

- Folder 11: Miscellaneous
- Folder 12: News clippings

Folder 13: Parish Visitations
Folder 14: Photographs
Folder 15: Projeto Homeopatia Para Todos
Folder 16: Redemptorists
Folder 17: Second Vatican Council
Folder 18: Rolodex
Folder 19: Writings

Boxes 3-6

Bishop Nolker Photo Albums and Other Memorabilia

Box 3: Five albums

On the occasion of his 75th birthday
Lembrança de Mantinhos
Ordination and jubilee material; obits
June 1989 CSSR jubilee party
1977 photo album describing the episcopal residence to his family

Box 4: Three albums

“Ordination Memories”
Picture diary of Bishop Nolker’s first voyage on mission to Brazil
Ornate wooden inlay album with blank pages

Box 5: oversized items

Bulls of appointment
Coat of arms
Photos with popes on *ad limina* visits

Box 6: Miscellanea

1 carousel tray of slides in box
1 box of medallions: gift of Pope Paul VI; Vatican II medallion; St. John Neumann
Canonization souvenir
1 box containing Bishop Nolkers episcopal ring and pectoral cross
1 box containing a rosary blessed by Pope St. John Paul II
1 box containing a souvenir medallion of Pope John Paul II
1 box containing a mother-of-pearl rosary and Bishop Nolker’s Redemptorist rosary
4 boxes of souvenirs from Paraguay
1 box containing a decorated pectoral cross, a gift of Pope St. John Paul II
1 box containing slides, an ornate letter opener, and a medal of Pope Pius X blessed by
the pope (a gift of Msgr. Mendalis)
1 photo album
6 envelopes of photographs: Cathedral of Paranaguà, formal portraits, ad limina visit to
Rome with Bishop Nolker and Pope John Paul II, Vatican II, and Bishop Nolker with Pope
Paul VI
Folder 1: framed picture of a young missionary and map of the diocese
Folder 2: correspondence related to jubilee celebrations
Folder 3: “Letters from the Mission,” 1966-1989
Bishop Nolker’s Redemptorist mission cross

Last updated: February 20, 2018/pjh