

User Perceptions about Archives at the Lutheran Theological Institute Library, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

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Abstract

This paper reports on the findings of a study that was carried out in 2014 at the Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI) Library on user perceptions about archives in the library. Archival registration data in the form of user statics, library membership statistics, annual reports and a questionnaire were the primary sources of data. The study established that users were generally aware of what archives are, that the most consulted archival materials were church and diocese minutes and that amongst the recommended strategies to promote visibility for the archives were exhibitions, guided tours, an open day on archives and the establishment of a friends of the archives group. The key important recommendations of the study were that frequently consulted materials had to be prioritised for digitisation as it was prone to damage due to the continuous handling. Another key recommendation was the need to streamline curricula to incorporate induction on archival instruction to help raise awareness about archives thereby promoting their importance and use within the Lutheran community. Lastly, the input of stakeholders as part of the friends of the archives group will help to champion the cause for religious archives, especially for the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries (PCTL).

Introduction

Outreach remains one of the fundamental responsibilities of an archivist. Millar (2010) pointed out that outreach is not only about making archival materials available but also involves raising awareness of the existence of the archival repository and the nature of its holdings and services. The need for archivists to take the lead in promoting awareness and appreciation of archives as advocated by Millar (2010) reaffirms why this task is so sacrosanct to the profession, and was one of the drivers of this study. Outreach refers to that group of activities that are designed to raise the profile of the archives thereby promoting the visibility and the use of archives.

Mnjama (2009) noted that access to records and archives is a very important part of their function in society, and there is a need for the general public to be made aware of the treasures the archival institutions are holding on their behalf. The transfer of this message to this general public was referred to by Dearsytne (1993) as promotional marketing. An assortment of terms has been used to refer to those activities in which the archival institution seeks user response to its services or in its bid to raise the profile of the organisation either internally or externally. Educational programmes, external programmes, advocacy, developmental services, public programming and public service are other synonyms used as substitutes for the broad term "outreach". Outreach has been defined as those activities whereby archival institutions ensure responsiveness to users, secure user participation and promote the use of archives (Harris 2000). Outreach is an extension of reference work and, as Roe (1988) highlighted, while the purpose of archives is to preserve and make available historical resources, that goal lacks substance if the resources remain unused. This view has been shared by (Harris ,2000; Pederson

1983; Freeman, 1984a; Blais and Ennes, 1990-91) who stated that public programming is arguably the clearest manifestation of archivists having embraced the notion that use is indeed the ultimate goal of all their endeavours.

Pearce-Moses (2005) defined outreach as the process of identifying and providing services to constituencies with needs relevant to the repository's mission, and tailoring services to meet those needs. What can be discerned from these foregoing definitions is that outreach has a dual purpose as it is focused on users in an effort to endear them to the institution and on raising the profile of the organisation as well. As noted by Pederson (2008), outreach is about relationships with people, with influencing people to change their attitudes and behaviours. In the same vein, Theimer (2014) argues that reframing our mission entails not only focusing on our collections but also on our constituencies, the people that is. Ericson (1990-91) also noted that opening up the holdings of an archival institution generates their increased usage and he stated that:

... if, after we brilliantly and meticulously appraise, arrange and describe archives and nobody comes to use them, then we have wasted our time.

Hunter (2003) pointed out that one of the frustrating things for an archivist is to know that the collections have great research value, but that they are underutilised. In fact, information gains value when utilised (Ngulube, 1999). Hence, this paper therefore attempts to establish inter alia whether there was awareness by users on what archives are, their importance, usage, if any, in their quest for knowledge.

Contextual Setting

The Lutheran Theological Institute (LTI) is owned by a Trust, the South African Lutheran Theological Training Trust (SALTTT) which is a common venture of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) and the United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA). The LTI is linked to the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics (SRPC) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg. The mission of the LTI is to train men and women for leadership,

ministry and service. The LTI Library is endowed with primary and secondary materials from its consolidated former institutions that is Umphumulo Lutheran Theological Seminary, the Marang Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Lutheran House of Studies. The LTI library is a member of the Cluster of Theological Institutions together with the Evangelical Seminary of Southern Africa (ESSA), the Catholics at St Joseph's Theological Institute, the Methodists at Seith Mokhitimi Methodist Seminary (SMMS), the Anglicans at the Anglican Diocese (AnHouse), the SRPC at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg and the Congregationalists at the Congregational House of Formation (CHoF). These institutions inter alia share library and staff resources. Students come from South Africa and from various African countries and other parts of the world. Averagely, the annual library membership is around 140+- registered users and this is made mostly of diploma, ministerial, undergraduate, postgraduate students, staff and retired members of the Lutheran Church.

Within the institute, there is archival repository that serves as an adjunct to the theological library, thereby serving as a rich resource of primary material on the history of the Lutheran Church in South Africa. At the LTI Archives documents relating to individual staff members, students, pastors, and their papers and research, as well as to institutions, associations, curricula, conferences, student bodies, applications, welfare etc, minutes of meetings, reports, societies, committees, records of appeal and adjudication, interoffice memos, appointment books, registers, charters, constitutions and bylaws, legal papers, deeds, articles of incorporation, agreements, financial ledgers, and various other papers pertaining to the different churches or missions are included in the files. In addition, the archival repository also maintains a historical depository of denominational journals, periodicals, convention proceedings or transactions pertaining to the Lutheran Church in South Africa (Garaba and Zaverdinos, 2014).

The documents housed at the LTI Archives came from the Lutheran Theological Seminary (LTS) at Umpumulo, the Marang Lutheran Theological Seminary and the Lutheran House of Studies. As noted above, the papers that came to the LTI from Hermannsburg/Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (ELCSA) from Northern Transvaal

(N-T)/United Evangelical Lutheran Church in Southern Africa (UELCSA) as well as the documents that have been in the LTI since it began to be administered by the South African Lutheran Theological Training Trust (SALTTT) are a valuable resource for the institute's corporate memory. In a nutshell, the importance of scholars using primary materials cannot be overstated for the simple reason that these documents bring one close to the originating experiences. More importantly, these primary materials enhance research and scholarship, enables one to appreciate the value of archives when deployed in the parishes for congregational service and inculcates a general awareness about archives.

Justification of the Study

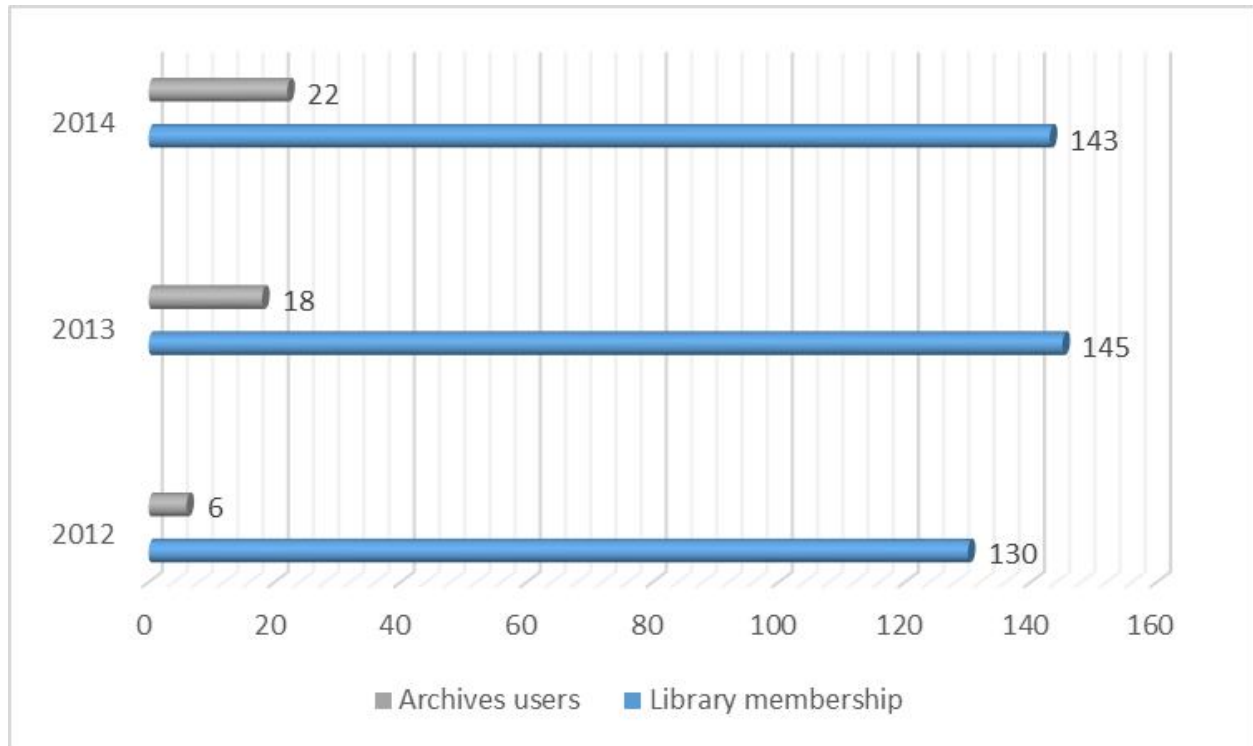
Access and utilisation of archives were deemed fundamental to this study for the simple reason that collections that remain sequestered from the public serve no purpose. Apparently, use remains the ultimate goal of all archival endeavour (Harris, 2000). The aim was to establish whether there is awareness by users on what archives are, their importance, usage, if any, in their quest for knowledge and their suggestions on how best to raise the profile of the archives with regard to publicity. In a nutshell, this was an attempt to assess the breadth of our potential constituency and the findings of the study may be beneficial to the LTI Archives as this will assist in outreach plans to raise the profile of the archives and also assist in identifying areas that the material can be used for the students' academic needs. In addition, the awareness so generated may also assist in safeguarding the Lutheran heritage when pastors are deployed in the parishes after completion of their ministerial training in view of the fact that they may be knowledgeable about the importance of religious archives.

Problem Statement

Access to and utilisation of archives is a fundamental human right. However in many archival repositories, access and usage of archives is significantly low simply because the importance of archives and their use are relatively unknown. This is because the identity or the image crisis tag that has haunted the profession since time immemorial has proven difficult to eradicate.

The International Archives Day (2014) observed that the public's image of the archives is foggy: often confused with libraries, archives continue to be perceived as documents for internal use only, which are difficult to access and are of interest only to historians. The perception of records and archives by the public and the organisations that create them are not clear. The repellent effects of Jenkinson's (1965) treatise that the primary duty of an archivist is the physical and moral defence of the archives have been a curse and very detrimental to the archival profession. That gatekeeping mentality has been contagious with regards to the perception that people have about archives hence clarion calls by Williams (2006) for the need for a cultural change of the place of archives within communities, whether large or small. In consequence, this means that there is need to conduct user studies to determine the needs of clients and to enable archivists to effectively relate to the public (Ngoepe and Ngulube, 2011). Duff and Cherry (2008) concurred and stated that archivists have begun to conduct more formal evaluation studies to ensure their services and systems meet users' needs.

Be that as it may, little research has been done in theological libraries with religious archives about access and utilisation of archives and general assessment of archival awareness by users. Kamatula's (2011) study on state archives revealed that collections in public archival institutions are not fully utilised as evidenced by the low number of researchers consulting archives especially within the eastern and southern African region. The same could be said about private archives with regards to their consultation. At the LTI Archives for example, whilst administrative statistics on the number of users consulting the archives shows a 27% increase between the years 2012 and 2014, much can be done to improve usage considering the annual membership for the library as illustrated in Table 1. The average annual membership at LTI is around 140. Consequently, this research was thus borne out of the need to assess archival awareness and consultation, suggest how curriculum improvement could be integrated with the use of archives by users thereby enhancing research and scholarship and identify strategies peculiar with users to raise the profile of archives.

Table 1: Users of Archives at LTI Library 2012-2014

Research Purpose and Objectives of the Study

The general purpose of this study was on access to religious archives in the LTI library with the primary aim of trying to establish whether there was awareness on what archives are, their importance, usage, if any, in users' quest for knowledge and identify their preferences on how best to raise the profile of the archives with regard to publicity. The specific focus areas were as follows:

- Establish the users' understanding of archives and identify frequently consulted materials;
- Assess whether users were aware of the constitutional provisions on the need for them to keep accurate records in parishes as specified by the ELCSA constitution;
- Determine awareness about the existence of an LTI Archives brochure in the library;
- Identify popular strategies recommended by users that the library should adopt to raise the profile of archives; and

- Make recommendations on curriculum improvement by advocating the integration of archives into their studies.

Review of Related Literature

Within the field of archival science, there is expanse literature on outreach or public programming though limited on the subject of religious archives. Kamatula (2011) carried out a survey of public repositories in Tanzania and pointed out that the decline in researchers consulting archives within the East and Southern African region was because of ineffective advocacy strategies. However user studies on public programming that focused on users and access to archives provided the foundation for this study. These include a case study by Borteye and Maaseg (2012) which focused on the use and users of the records at the Manhyia Archives of the Institute of African Studies, Kumasi, Ghana. An important recommendation emanating from this study was the need to intensify efforts to promote the existence, availability, and potential use of the records.

Similarly, Ngoepe and Ngulube (2011) carried out a study at the National Archives and Records Services of South Africa (NARS) in which they concluded that there was a need to promote NARS public image and use of archival holdings through robust outreach programmes. Kilasi, Maseko and Abankwah (2011) carried out a comparative study on expectations and behaviours of users in the national archival institutions of Swaziland and Tanzania. An important recommendation from this study was the need for both institutions to market their services aggressively to attract potential users. Murambiwa and Ngulube (2011) carried out a baseline study on the National Archives of Zimbabwe in which they attempted to develop an access index for the institution. Their study established that access can be objectively quantified at the National Archives using parameters such as accessioning and processing volumes, reader figures, finding aids, publications and access carrying capacity.

To reiterate the importance of outreach, Chute (2000) concluded that outreach must be central to what all archivists do, because it can solidify the archives' position within an academic community. Ten Cate (1989) and Freeman (1984b) urged archivists to adopt an action-oriented philosophy when undertaking a public relations programme of any description. A significant finding synonymous with these studies was the need for advocacy to raise the profile of archives. On the other hand, the need to encourage the use of primary sources by users thereby promoting information literacy also formed the basis of this study. Yakel and Torres (2003) (See also Duff and Cherry 2008), proposed a model of researcher expertise and discuss how this model might be incorporated into archival user education to create information literacy for primary sources. Carini (2009) and Nimer and Daines (2012) concurred and stated that archivists need to become educators and teach research methods more akin to information literacy for primary sources.

Methodology

This was case study research that employed the use of archival registration data and a questionnaire to collect quantitative data. This was an archetypal case study that created a category for analysis based on user perceptions of archives by an academic community. The 9th of June of each year is internationally recognised as Archives Day by the International Council on Archives (ICA) and the LTI Archives mounted an exhibition inside the library of its archives and other memorabilia for the whole month of June 2014. During the course of this promotional display, viewers were handed a questionnaire for completion in attempts to assess their general understanding of archives. The number of users recorded in our daily register who visited the stand during this month was 35, and each was given a questionnaire for completion during their own spare time.

Enclosed in the questionnaire was a poem on religious archives as a token of appreciation for them participating in this exercise and as a form of advertisement. In addition, users were also given a link on a live feed about the International Archives Day for them to click and see the LTI Archives' pictures and other activities happening around the world on the International Council on Archives (ICA) website. An orientation tour of the repository scheduled for Fridays in the month of June failed to materialise due to logistic challenges. Despite this downside, a total of 29 copies of the questionnaire were returned by users which represented a response rate of 83%. This high response rate is attributed to the fact that the researcher had personal contact with the study population and was thus able to explain the purpose, relevance and importance of the study. The breakdown of the study population was as follows:

Research Findings

Characteristics of Respondents

The breakdown of the study population was as follows:

Table 1: Education level of users (N=29)

Education level	Total	%
PhD	4	13.8
Master’s degree	3	10.3
Honours degree	4	13.8
Bachelor’s degree (General)	3	10.3
Diploma	4	13.7
Higher certificate	5	17.2
Staff	4	13.8
Ministerial	2	6.9

On gender, the study found out that there were more male (65%) than female (35%) participants who participated in the study.

Establishing the Users’ Understanding of Archives and Frequently Consulted Publications

Library users at the LTI were generally aware of what archives are, as 18 (62%) of the answers were

in the affirmative compared to 11 (32%) who were unaware. The archival materials largely familiar with users were minutes, diocese and church council minutes that are shown in Figure 1, and these were the frequently consulted as well.

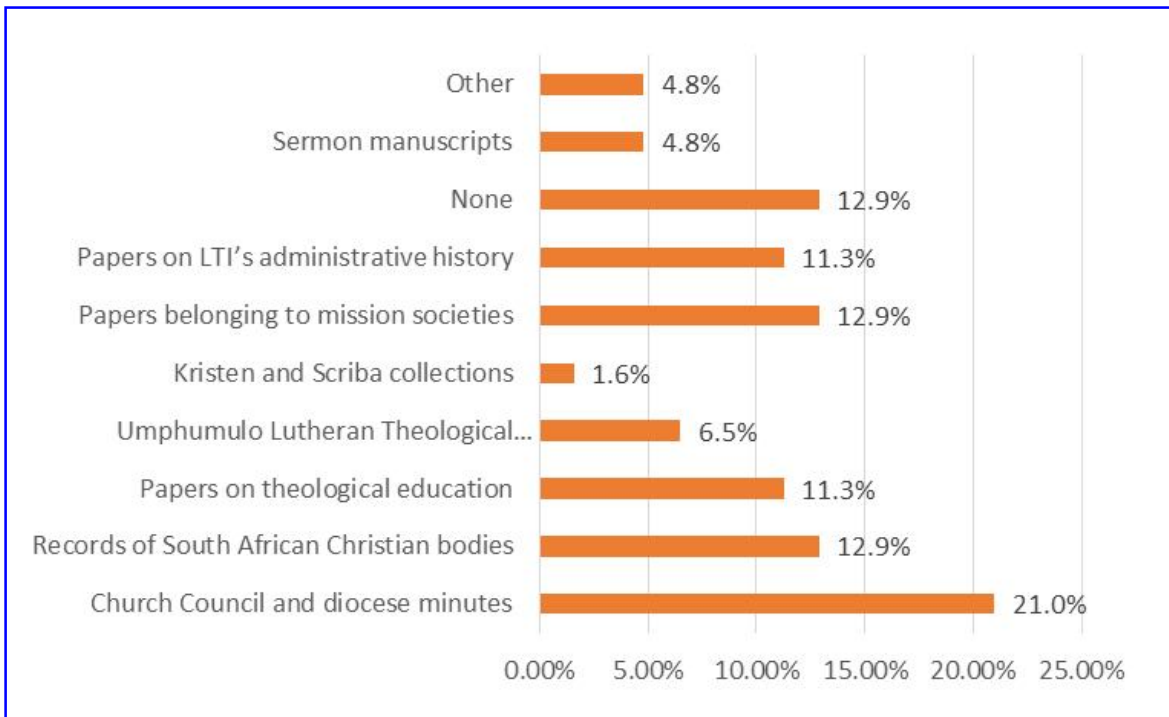


Figure 1: Material Familiar with Users

Users’ Awareness of the Constitutional Provisions on the Need for them to Keep Accurate Records in Parishes as Specified by the ELCSA Constitution

Respondents were asked whether they were aware of the constitutional provisions of ELCSA with regards to records keeping requirements. Majority of the respondents, 18 (62%) were aware compared to 11 (32%) who were not.

Determining the Awareness about the Existence of an LTI Archives Brochure in the Library

Publications in the form of brochures provide a medium of communicating with users of the archives. In the LTI library, an archives brochure is filled with

library guides at the front desk and users were thus asked whether they were aware of its existence. Majority of the users 17 (59%) were aware of the LTI brochure in the library. The remaining users 12 (41%) were not aware.

Identifying Popular Strategies Recommended by Users that the Library Should Adopt to Raise the Profile of Archives

A host of mechanisms are available in attempts to reach out to the community on the existence of archives. Figure 2 shows that exhibitions (19.2%), Open day on archives (14.4%), guided tours (13.5%) and friends of the archives (10.6%) were some of the popular strategies that users recommended in efforts to raise awareness about archives.

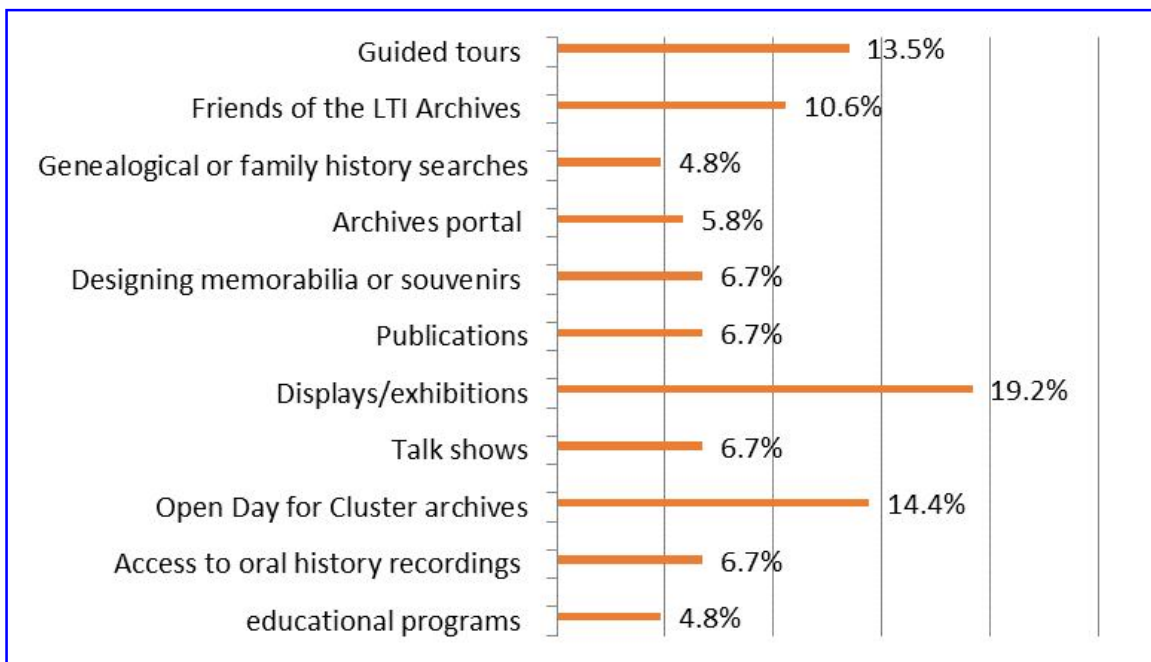


Figure 2: Recommended Advocacy Strategies by Users

Suggestion by Users on Curriculum Improvement

Instructional programmes provide the foundation for users to be made aware of what archives are, to be able use this primary material and also enable them to appreciate the value of archives and their use. From Figure 2 above, it is discernible that 5 (4.8%) of the surveyed population proposed instructional programmes as a method of raising awareness about archives. Such a suggestion is significant in that incorporating a basic archival course in the students' curriculum particularly for the Lutheran history module would go a long way in raising awareness about archives.

Discussion of Results

The need to identify who users were, remains one of the fundamental requirements of the archival profession. Overall, the findings reveal that the environment in which the LTI Archives is functioning is structured for a predominantly academic clientele. The LTI Archives is thus an in-house, private archive with a theological focus whose sole mandate is to keep the institution's corporate history and provide access to this material to its members. Firstly, the findings revealed that there was a general understanding of what archives are and this is evidenced by the use of church and diocese minutes which remain the frequently consulted material. The reason why minutes are popular is because of the currency of information they contain as these are usually up to date with policy issues and decisions concerning the church. User statistics at the LTI Archives and annual reports between the years 2011 and 2014 confirm that minutes are the most consulted of all archival material.

Secondly, the ELCSA constitution (2012), Chapter 2, Section 2.10 stipulates that pastors should keep accurate records and make annual and other reports of activities within their respective parishes available when needed. The study found out that the majority of library users were aware of this provision but more should be done to raise awareness in an effort to promote best practices in records keeping in parishes. Reference is made to church and diocese council minutes, popular with users but the series of minutes is incomplete due to inconsistencies in transferring these minutes from

the dioceses to the LTI library. There are so many gaps in the minutes, and users are made to be aware of this, and clarion calls made to the user that when they get back to their dioceses they need to remind those in charge of records to timeously transfer these to the LTI library.

Publications in the form of brochures remain one of the most effective mechanisms of raising the profile of an archive. Roe (1988) noted that archives use publications to provide impetus and information about their resources. The findings revealed that the bulk of users were aware of the LTI brochure in the library because it is easily accessible. A variety of strategies can be employed to raise the profile of an archive. At the LTI Archives, the recommended public programming activities by users were exhibitions, an open day on archives, guided tours and friends of the archives. Exhibitions will always be popular with users because they are eye-catching; and as noted by Pederson (2008), they provide a vehicle for the archives to show off its collections. More importantly, as noted by Bradsher and Ritzenthaler (1988), archival exhibits are mounted to interest, inform, stimulate, entertain and educate viewers.

The downside of exhibitions notwithstanding, the fact that they are naturally short-term is the attendant challenges with regards to the conservation and security of material. It was in this light that Pederson (2008) remarked that while public interest, enthusiasm and contact with original sources is to be encouraged, it should however not be at the peril of records.

Nonetheless, having an open day on archives is significant in that it enables the user to take pride in the collections and identify with the heritage, as this makes the user feel special and have that sense of belonging. Guided tours in archives enable users to be familiar with their archives in terms of their housing and special stewardship needs. Stakeholders' input calls for archivists to be activists in order to endear influential people to the cause of archives and this explains why users recommended the LTI Archives to establish a friends of the archives group.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study established that library users at the LTI Library were generally aware of what archives are. Frequently consulted materials are minutes which

usually deal with policy and other matters pertaining to the Lutheran church. Users were also generally aware of the ELCSA constitution with regards to the section on the need to maintain best practices in records keeping. The LTI Archives brochure's existence in the library is known to users as it is available at the front desk where users can pick it up. The study also found that users preferred displays, an open day on archives and stakeholders' input as strategies for advocacy. The following recommendations are thus made based on the findings of the study:

- The heavy usage of church council and diocese minutes calls for archivists to prioritise these for digitisation to prevent wear and tear. Digitisation can either be access or preservation oriented or both. Once digitised, the use of surrogates as substitutes will mean that the originals can be safely tucked away in the repository thereby prolonging their usable life span through passive storage. Access can be guaranteed by the provision of digital copies and not photocopies as is at present the case. Ngulube (2002) observed that photocopying in Sub-Saharan Africa is primarily done for user convenience. However, photocopying is not a recommended reformatting strategy because the heat and light that the material is subjected to during the copying process only hastens the chemical degeneration of paper.
- Much needs to be done to raise awareness about good records keeping practices as stipulated by the ELCSA constitution. Records keeping in parishes remains shambolic, and this is confirmed by a study carried out by Garaba (2015) and gaps in minutes housed in the repository evidently points to a lack of a properly structured records management system. LTI lecturers need to streamline their modules to incorporate the archival component particularly for the Lutheran history module and the input of manuscript librarians to help with archival instruction is mandatory. Information literacy of primary sources goes beyond consulting minutes as it is at present the case hence the need for the input of manuscript librarians in archival induction in collaboration with lecturers especially with regards to identifying archival materials related to course curricula. Pederson (2008) correctly noted that students should have some exposure to the riches of contemporary and original sources as part of their general education and in so doing avoid perpetuating community ignorance about archives.
- Displays remain an integral aspect in showcasing the holdings of an archival repository and the International Archives Day in June every year should help in this endeavour. In view of the fact that there was so much enthusiasm from users generated by the displays in 2014, much needs to be done in this regard to endear the Lutheran community to their archives. Consequently, the rich photographic heritage of the institution's corporate history in digital form should be used to create an interactive exhibit in an effort to raise awareness about archives. Using digital instead of analogue photographic copies as it was the case in 2014, will help in safeguarding their useable lifespan with regards to handling issues. In addition having an open day on archives for the theological cluster as recommended by users will also help in this cause. This open day could be done biennially on a rotational basis by the theological institutions affiliated to the cluster just like the popular Cluster Sports Day which promotes recreational collegiality in true ecumenical spirit.
- Pederson (2008) noted that the purpose of friends group is to rally and focus community support for the archives, and the LTI Archives needs this support for its growth. Some of the areas that this group can look into which urgently need attention at the LTI Archives include:
 - Fundraising for the repository which needs a major facelift;
 - Purchase of specialised equipment; and
 - Sponsorships during exhibits and having a reception after the exhibition to engage with the LTI community and generate that excitement about archives.
- To bring the holdings of the LTI Archives to public attention, guided tours of the repository should be done regularly so that the community recognises the importance of historical

documentation. Curricula need to be streamlined to make it compulsory for LTI diploma and ministerial classes to use primary materials in their courses and tours arranged with manuscript librarians to this effect. Roberts (2014) could not have put it better when he noted that archivists have a unique understanding of their collections and are expert at identifying those records that contain adventure, mystery, intrigue, humour, surprise and the unexpected.

- The study needs to be replicated for the Pietermaritzburg Cluster of Theological Libraries (PCTL) to facilitate better understanding of user perceptions about archives to enable advocacy planning and strategies thereby raising the profile of archives.

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