

MANY GIFTS, ONE SPIRIT

Pastoral and Sacramental Policies for the
Archdiocese of Seattle

Archives and Records Management Policy

Only those will enter whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

REVELATION 21: 27b

ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT

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ARCHIVES AND RECORDS MANAGEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this publication is to provide pastoral staff an introduction to the basic principles and procedures relating to the creation and maintenance of an archives and records management program for parishes, faith communities, and schools. It is highly recommended that the archdiocesan Archivist/ Records Manager be contacted when creating, planning, and implementing an archives and records management program.

II. ESTABLISHING ARCHIVES AND MAINTAINING RECORDS

AR 1. In accordance with *CIC*, cc. 491 and 535, each parish and faith community is to establish and maintain an archives.

- 1.a. The term “archives” refers to the non-current records of an organization or institution, preserved because of their continuing, permanent, or historical value.
- 1.b. The term “archives” may also refer to the physical plant or building where such materials are located.
- 1.c. The materials found in an archives document the growth and history of a local parish, faith community, or school. Institutional archives usually contain records, such as correspondence, meeting minutes, and memoranda, that were create to support daily business transactions.
- 1.d. In addition to the written record, the archives may also contain artifacts, such as altar linens, vestments, and liturgical objects, and photographs that illustrate the nature and development of the community.

AR 2. A records management program is necessary for legal, administrative, fiscal, and canonical reasons.

- 2.a. Records management is the administration of a program that supports the systemic creation, organization, maintenance, and disposition (or reading and weeding) of the records of parishes, faith communities, and schools.

- 2.b. With the passage of time, a successful working records management program will feed into parish or school's established archives.

AR 3. The records management program must identify records that are permanent or archival and see to the transfer of those records to the archives.

- 3.a. Once records have been placed in the archives, proper identification and preservation can take place.
- 3.b. To ensure organization, a thorough inventory of these records must be created.

AR 4. An archives and records management policy is to be created in order to clearly outline the program and the scope and content of the archives, and allow for the coordination of records management with the archives.

- 4.a. The following is a sample policy statement that may be adapted to particular needs:

Sample Policy Statement: The purpose of the archives of [Name of Institution] is to collect, organize, preserve, and make available for research, the official records of [Name of Institution]. The purpose of the records management program is to ensure that the active and inactive records of [Name of Institution] are managed in a manner in keeping with the standards of the records management profession, and to ensure the transfer of the appropriate records to the archives. The records management and archives program is established in accordance with *CIC*, c. 535, § 4, which states that each parish is to have a registry or archives in which the parish books are kept along with Episcopal letters and other documents which ought to be preserved due to necessity or usefulness...

- 4.b. "Other documents" may be defined as any recorded information (including artifacts and photographs) regardless of format (printed or electronic) that are made, received, or maintained by [Name of Institution] as a result of conducting business or pursuing legal obligations, and have been determined to be permanent or historically significant by the records retention schedule or basic appraisal criteria. The pastor is canonically responsible for the records of a parish, faith community, or parish school. This responsibility has been delegated to [Name of Individual] in order to assure the appropriate administration of the program.

- 4.c. A records management and archival program in a parish, faith community, or school must have adequate support and resources to succeed.
- 4.d. It is recommended that the archives and records management policy be reviewed by the Archdiocesan Archivist/ Records Manager and then submitted for approval to the local pastor, administrator, pastoral life director, school principal, or appropriate councils prior to promulgation.

AR 5. To implement the archives and records management policy, the following procedure must be followed.

- 5.a. Locate and survey all records, from sacramental registers to canceled checks.
- 5.b. Create an inventory or list of the records. The inventory would include the name of the file, the date range of materials in the file, and the location of the files.
- 5.c. When surveying records for value and disposition, follow the Parish and Faith Community Retention Schedule (see Appendix A).
- 5.d. The surveys and inventories provide a basis for future decisions, such as revising the current filing system, creating retention schedules, and appraising records.

AR 6. The following criteria for appraisal (or discernment of the records' values) are to be considered when making decisions about the disposition of records: administrative, legal, fiscal, historical, intrinsic, and in some instances, canonical.

- 6.a. Some records have more than one of these values, and some of these values indicated short term records retention over permanent retention or placement in the archives.
- 6.b. Determine which records are active, inactive, or archival. Active records are records necessary for current business, or those referenced on a daily basis. Inactive records are referenced fewer than 10 times per year of those records that are required to be kept for a short period of time (such as many financial records).
- 6.c. Archival records are those records determined to be permanent or historically significant.

AR 7. Records created by and for employees of a parish, faith community, or school, belong to that institution and not to the individual. As such, these records are property of the institution and are to be retained by the institution.

7.a. The majority of the records created during the course of conducting business is not considered confidential, but at the same time are not open to general research for twenty-five years after the creation of the record. However, there are many records of a parish, faith community, or school that are confidential in nature. These records may include sacramental registers, transcripts, marriage records, donor files, and counseling or medical records. Access to these records is legally and canonically restricted, and the privacy of the Christian faithful and the confidentiality of the records must be protected.

7.b. Sacramental records and transcripts may not be used to compile membership lists of alumni. This type of information is to be gathered and kept in other ways or formats.

AR 8. Once records are placed in the archives, proper care is to be taken to maintain their provenance (creating office or individual) and original order.

8.a. Original order illustrates the relational context and evidential value of the records, as well as the utility of the records to the originating office or creator.

8.b. If original order and/or provenance has been obscured or destroyed it is recommended that the records be arranged according to function, type, and date. For example: “Seattle-St. Mary Church, Altar Guild, Minutes, 1935-1940.” It may be necessary to identify further or describe more fully certain records if the parish has a school, or the faith community has unique aspects that require additional description.

AR 9. Archival records are to be kept in a stable environment where the temperature does not fluctuate.

9.a. It is vital that the process used to preserve and protect materials does not harm them, and that “what is done can always be undone.”

9.b. Allowing that the ideal environment for archival records is difficult to achieve, the following basic steps are recommended to preserve these materials:

- Food and beverages are not allowed in the processing space or in the archives;
- Pencils are to be used for notations and labels;
- White cotton gloves are to be worn when handling textiles and photographs;
- Acid free folders and acid free boxes are to be used to contain archival materials;
- Acid free tissue is to be used to support and cover textiles;
- Acid free paper is to be used to interleave photographs.

AR 10. The archives of a parish, faith community, or school may be located in many places, such as a vault in the parish office or a locking fireproof filing cabinet in the school library.

The archives may not be located in the home of an individual or staff member or in any space separate from the physical plant.

AR 11. A neutral and secure environment is necessary for the preservation and security of the materials in the archives.

AR 12. Sacramental registers must be kept in a vault or locking fireproof filing cabinet to ensure maximum security.

AR 13. Since sacramental records are private and confidential, sacramental registers are not to be viewed by anyone other than the pastor and staff members designated by the pastor.

AR 14. Particular care is to be given to the confidential nature of sacramental records and transcripts, and the records themselves are to be kept in a secure, fireproof, locking filing cabinet, safe, or room.

AR 15. Access to these records by pastoral or school staff is to be kept at a minimum.

III. MAINTAINING SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

Sacramental records are both public and private in nature. Baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and funerals are recorded to document sacred acts, and are not intended as civil records. As such, they are private records. They are also private because data contained therein are often confidential, and the records are created with the presumption of privacy. However, sacramental

records may be considered public records with regard to civil law when an appropriate civil record does not exist. They are not public, however, in the same sense as civil records. The passage of time affects the sensitivity of records such as these, and the need for restricting their use diminishes.

- AR 16. Access is unrestricted to sacramental records created 90 years prior to January 1 of the current year.**
- AR 17. Requests for sacramental records must be made in writing and signed by the individual conform to sacramental records policy.**
- AR 18. Sacramental registers are not to be viewed by the public, or anyone other than personnel/staff.**
- AR 19. Photocopies of sacramental records are not allowed; instead, a transcription or new official certificate may be issued by personnel/staff.**
- AR 20. Records in an electronic format (diskettes, tapes, or CD-ROMs) are not considered an archival or permanent medium.**
 - 20.a. However, some records created or stored on electronic media may be archival.
 - 20.b. Any electronic records determined to be archival are to be printed out and kept in paper format in the archives of the parish, faith community, or school, or steps are to be taken to assure migration to new technologies when necessary. This would include records such as general ledgers and membership lists.
- AR 21. The retention of records is based on various legal, administrative, and canonical requirements; additional retention schedules may not be determined without consulting the archdiocesan Archivist/Records Manager (for records retention schedule, see Appendix A).**

APPENDIX A: RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULE FOR PARISHES, FAITH COMMUNITIES, ARCHDIOCESAN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS AND THE CHANCERY

The schedule contained in the prior version of this document became obsolete effective March 8, 2012.

Please follow the link www.seattlearchdiocese.org/retention to the archdiocesan website for the current schedules.

1. Records Retention Schedule for Parishes & Faith Communities
2. Records Retention Schedule for Archdiocesan Catholic Schools
3. Records Retention Schedule for the Chancery