



SACRAMENTAL RECORDS POLICY

The Archives of the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle currently holds sacramental registers maintained by early pioneer priests dating from 1838 to 1900 as well as those of some parishes and missions. Information contained in these registers is available to researchers through the Archives staff. Genealogical research is conducted the first and third Fridays of each month. In compliance with access and preservation policies, the original registers are not generally available for examination.

The records of St. James Parish, Vancouver, from 1838 to 1900 are located in the Archives as well; however, these have been published in "Catholic Church Records of the Pacific Northwest, Vancouver and the Stellamaris Mission." This publication is available at most public libraries as well as the Archives. The sacramental registers for closed parishes, such as Our Lady Queen of Martyrs and Our Lady of Good Help, are also located in the Archives.

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. Therefore, limited access is granted to sacramental records created **90 years prior to January 1 of the current year.**

Every person has the right to obtain an official certificate of his/her own sacramental records. These records are normally found in the parish in which the sacrament took place. In cases where the church or institution has closed, many of the sacramental records are located in the Archives of the Catholic Archdiocese of Seattle. Requests for copies of records that are public in nature and deal with a person's status in the Church (Canon 487, §2) can be made of the appropriate parish or the Archdiocesan Archives. Official certificates are only issued to the individual requesting his/her record or to the person who has a legitimate reason for requesting a family record (e.g., the parent of a minor child). The registers themselves are not open for examination.

The following are procedures for requesting sacramental records:

1. Requests for family or genealogical information are handled by mail or are initiated by filling out the [Sacramental Records Request Form](#).
2. Requests are to be as specific as possible and should include the following: surname; given name; church or location of ceremony; approximate date; and type of record (baptism, marriage, or funeral). Additional information such as parent's names, birth dates, address at the time of the ceremony, are also helpful in determining where the records may be located.
3. Transcriptions or certificates are issued in English and include all pertinent family information except regarding legitimacy. In cases where several requests for records are made at one time, the information is transcribed within the body of a letter, and not issued on individual certificates. Copies of the registers themselves are not made.
4. The Archives cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information entered in the registers. The entries were meant to be sacramental records, not vital statistics.
5. To ensure the privacy of the sacramental recipient, a photocopy (or scanned image) of one form of government-issued identification (passport, driver's license, military ID) is required with a letter of request and payment.