

Protect and Organize Your Papers

Resources for Preserving and Proclaiming the Story of Christ's Church



As a corporation the congregation becomes involved in the acquisition, maintenance and care of its legal documents and other papers vital to its ministry and to the safeguarding of its properties. This resource presents some guidelines with respect to the preservation, filing and maintenance of such official/legal documents and other materials and resources of vital concern and interest to the local parish.

The Need to Think in Terms of Preservation

We often take paper for granted, unaware of the biological enemies that feed on this substance and of the harmful practices that destroy the paper and its information. We recommend the following measures to extend the life of your family papers. These are measures designed to slow the process of deterioration. A professional conservator should do any active conservation practices.

Materials to be Preserved

- ❖ All the materials that answer the question *who, what, when, where* and *why* of the local congregation.
- ❖ The following documents must be preserved:
 - Records of the official acts, especially for baptism, confirmation, marriage, burial, accessions and releases.
 - Copies of all constitutions, past and present, both of the congregation and of all its organizations.
 - Minutes of the voters' meetings, church council, building committee and other important committees with the exception of the records currently

in use that must remain in the possession of the respective secretaries.

- Copies of the deeds and descriptions of the church properties, titles, leases, surveys, etc.
- Mortgages should be retained even after they have been retired. (It is poor policy to burn them.)
- Articles of Incorporation and amendments.
- List of charter members.
- Copies of all transfers and cases of excommunication and discipline shall be permanently preserved.
- Annual list of all names of officers, boards and commissions.
- ❖ Other records often overlooked that should be preserved and filed systematically include:
 - Official correspondence.
 - Copies of reports of all the congregation's official committees and commissions, and societies and auxiliary organizations.
 - Non-current treasurer's records, including monthly and annual reports.
 - Bulletins from special services such as installations, dedications, and

anniversaries, congregational newsletters, and special congregational letters to the membership.

- Histories of the congregation.
- Chronological, running accounts of the major events and activities in the congregation.
- Statistical and comparative account of major events and activities of the congregation.
- Educational institutional records include weekday, Sunday school, and special areas, such as records of teachers, enrollment, policies, textbooks, curriculum, offerings, tuition, and confirmations.
- Photographs of churches, schools, pastors, teachers and other personnel and organizations making sure to identify by name, occasion, date and place (who, what, when, where).
- Audio items indicating a way of life, tape recordings of special services, events, and other oral and visual resources.

How Should these Items be Preserved?

- ❖ Fireproof filing cabinet, equipped with a lock, stored in an area least affected by heat, extremely dry temperatures, high humidity or temperature fluctuations.
- ❖ The ledgers containing the official acts should be adequately identified on the spine and cover, numbering the books in numerical order and including the dates covered. Consideration should be given to if these records should be scanned when new ledgers begin or at the anniversary year. Copies of the scans could be stored at a second location.
- ❖ All official correspondence shall be filed in acid-free folders. As correspondence

builds up, only the corporation will continue to be relevant, not the individual. Further it is desirable to designate correspondence that has permanent value and slated for permanent retention, in contrast to correspondence which has only ephemeral value. After the file folders consume too much space in a file, portions of the older correspondence may be stored in Hollinger archive boxes and placed on open steel shelves. This is considerably cheaper than purchasing additional filing cabinets and ensures utilizing the filing cabinets for current records only.

- ❖ Records shall be placed on a retention and destruction schedule. It has been estimated that more than half of contemporary records can ultimately be destroyed because they have no historical or legal value.
- ❖ Records shall be periodically inspected for atmospheric and vermin damage. Adequate safeguards and protective measures should be taken.
- ❖ Vital records outlined above should never be permitted to be removed from the church premises. In certain cases, however, it may be more desirable for the local parish to store its vital records in the vault of a local bank. Generally speaking, when congregations can install a vault with proper atmospheric controls, it is considered superior to file all the resources of the congregation referred to in this bulletin in Hollinger archive boxes on open steel shelves in such a vault.

Cooperation with Synodical Deposits

- ❖ To have the congregational archivist function and serve effectively and establish a vital link between congregation and Synod, the

congregational archivist should remain in touch with the Synod archives. He or she should transmit the congregational resources in duplicate. Among the items to be transmitted to both the district and synodical archives are:

- Printed or manuscript histories of congregations.
- Special orders of service from ordinations, installations, burials, groundbreaking, dedications, anniversaries, etc.
- ❖ N.B. State, county and local historical societies are also interested in obtaining printed congregational histories.

Using the Archives

- ❖ Anyone with a legitimate purpose should be permitted to use the archives. Some records should be restricted (e.g., records of a church discipline case should not be published or handled except by a few people like the pastor and the elders).
- ❖ When records are searched, the person doing research should use the documents in the same room or nearby, copying information needed but not removing the file or document. After use, the records should be immediately refiled, using care not to cause any damage.
- ❖ The records committee of the congregation should establish policies for access to materials.

The Environment

Minimize temperature extremes and fluctuations. Ideals are no higher than 70 degrees F with 50 percent relative humidity. Keep materials cool and dry. Avoid storing in attics, basements, outbuildings, and areas around water pipes. Such environments encourage mold, mildew, and moisture, which rust fasteners. Avoid direct light.

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Sunlight and fluorescent light weaken and fade papers and inks—store papers in a dark area. Avoid food and drink while handling materials. These items can soil your papers and attract insects and rodents. Avoid dirt and dust. These are abrasive elements. Keep your papers covered. Store in acid-free boxes and use acid-free folders that are buffered with an alkaline reserve. Although more expensive, these materials help preserve your materials.

Handling Practices

Wash hands before handling historical materials. Unfold materials carefully, but do not force back a fold. Folds and creases weaken the paper. Avoid clips and fasteners, including staples and pins, pressure-sensitive tapes, rubber bands and glues, and other adhesives. Photocopy/scan newspapers instead of clipping them (noting date and source) or separating them from other papers—the acid in newsprint transfers to surrounding papers, discoloring and weakening the fibers. Make security copies. Many repositories will photocopy/scan materials if the documents meet collection policies, and the repository can retain a copy for research purposes. These are simple practices that can prevent problems with paper materials.

Church Closure

In the event your congregation closes, all the records mentioned here should be transferred to the Synod Archives for permanent preservation. Your congregation leaders should work directly with the archives to schedule the transfer of these records to the Synod Archives.