

A GUIDE TO CHURCH RECORD KEEPING

Records need to be kept for good reasons:

Firstly for administrative and legal requirements. In the future there needs to be a clear picture of all decisions which are made, what led to these decisions and details regarding financial commitments and legal obligations etc. Instances arise in the future when such details are needed and written records are essential if the correct information is to be provided.

What records should be kept?

- Minutes of organizational and congregational meetings
- Minutes and reports of the Committee of Management, Session etc
- Selected correspondence of all committees and groups
- Annual reports (congregation, committees, groups)
- Registers of baptisms and marriages
- Membership lists
- Newsletters (regular, monthly, quarterly etc.)
- Publications (histories, anniversaries, special occasions, brochures, service orders for special occasions)
- Legal documents (constitutions, property titles, employment contracts)
- Sunday School records (attendance rolls)
- Photographs and audiovisual material (buildings, Ministers, members, special occasions)
- Building plans
- Financial records

Printed or electronic copy?

Electronic (or digital) storage changes frequently so paper copies are the best for posterity. Do not use sticky tape to put sheets in books. (It dries, stains the paper and the sheets become loose.) Use paper glue (white PVA glue), or better still use loose leaf binders for the purpose of keeping Minutes.

Correspondence

Not all correspondence needs to be kept. If it helps tell the story of the congregation, it should be retained permanently. That which relates to matters still current should be retained for administrative purposes. The remainder can be destroyed. Bear in mind that in the future if a problem arises details may be required so correspondence relating to major issues or buildings etc should be kept.

Registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages & burials

These are valuable records and are frequently needed for reference. They should be kept up-to-date. They should never be destroyed.

Newsletters (regular, monthly, quarterly etc.)

A copy should be posted to the PCQ Archives for permanent retention – put PCQ Archives on your mailing list.

Sunday Bulletins

These have temporary value and should be kept for a short time (say 3-5 years) and then they can be destroyed.

Membership records

Any printed list should be dated. If you are using a computer program to keep membership records, do not delete the records of members who have died or transferred membership to another congregation. Move their details to another file of former members.

Publications

Histories, anniversaries, special occasions, brochures, service orders for special occasions.

Legal Documents, Contracts, Plans for buildings etc

These are important documents and need to be stored safely. A record needs to be made as to where they are stored (particularly if they are stored away from the church office). It is not a good idea for records to be kept in private homes. These records can be easily lost.

Photographs and audiovisual material

Photographs need to be carefully identified. Write the names of the people and places and the date of the photo on a piece of paper and put both in an envelope. If you must write on the photo, use a 4B or 6B pencil. Better still - photocopy the photo and write identification on the photocopy.

Other audiovisual material needs to be similarly identified.

Financial records

These are legally required to be kept for 7 years under the ACNC Regulations.

Annual financial reports should be retained permanently.

Records relating to significant purchases should also be retained. This could be furniture, organ, memorial windows, etc.

It is not necessary to keep bank statements, cheque book butts, invoices, receipts, collection books, cash books, etc. beyond the 7 year legal requirement.

Storage of Records

Records need to be stored securely. They need to be protected from fire, damp, heat, light, silverfish and theft. They also need to be well-organised and a list needs to be prepared of what records exist and where they are stored.