



GUIDELINES FOR PARISH RECORDS AND ARCHIVES

GOOD PARISH RECORDS AND ARCHIVES

It's very important to make good parish records and to keep them safely and in good order.

There are two main reasons why:

1. Records are essential to sound parish administration. They make it possible for the parish to operate efficiently and with integrity, fulfilling its legal and financial responsibilities.
2. Records form a cultural and historical record of parish life. This has value not just for the parish, but also for the diocese and for the community in general.

Security is vital. Records which hold confidential information about the church or individuals (e.g. registers) must be kept securely and only made available to authorised persons.

Here are some tips on getting your parish records in order and keeping them safe.

WHAT TO KEEP?

- All vestry record books
- All registers: eg baptismal, marriage banns, confirmation, marriage, funeral/burial
- Annual Vestry minutes and reports
- Parish Council or Committee minutes (these should include regular financial reports)
- Sunday School records and rolls
- Records of parish-based youth activities (eg GFS, CEBS, YAF, or other organised youth activities)
- Minutes and records of groups such as Mother's Union, parish sporting clubs, etc.
- All parish publications - eg newsletters or magazines, parish histories, published reports (And did you know that you must send a copy of any parish publications to the State Library of South Australia as part of the SA legal deposit scheme? see <https://www.slsa.sa.gov.au/legal-deposit> for more information)
- Pew sheets
- All insurance records and property records
- Invoices for significant transactions, e.g. purchase of an organ
- Certain legal documents (if in doubt, keep it)

- Significant correspondence (eg priest, parish secretary, treasurer, wardens)
- Financial records for legal retention periods. (Bank statements, cheque books, etc must legally be kept for 7 years. They can then be destroyed. Store them separately from your permanent archival records to make disposal at the right time easier. Dispose of expired financial documents securely, even old ones.)
- Photographs, audio/visual material
- Other significant documents and memorabilia that record the life of the parish

Electronic records are great for office use, but the most reliable long-term storage format is still 'hard copy'. Important digital records should be printed on paper for permanent storage.

ORGANISING YOUR PARISH ARCHIVES

1. Locate all records. Look in the church safe, parish office, storage cupboards, cellar, attic, under the church hall stage, in the rectory, private homes,...
2. Separate your old ('inactive') records from your current ('active') records. Active records will remain in use. 'Inactive' records are the ones you will sort for archives.
3. If possible, bring all your old records together in one place at one time. Trestle tables are good to work on – you need plenty of working space. Make sure your hands and work surfaces are clean.
4. Sort records into categories, e.g. vestry record books, baptismal registers, parish council minutes. Within the categories, arrange the records chronologically.
5. Make a list of the records. Record the subject/title, date range and a brief description.
6. As you go, make note of records that are fragile, needing repair or special care.
7. Identify records that must be kept for legal retention periods (eg financial). Store these separately from permanent archival records.
8. From all the rest, decide what should be kept (referring to list above). Is it an official record of parish activity? Is it a significant or meaningful record of the life and history of the parish? Records that are selected to be kept are your "archives".
9. Archival records should be stored appropriately. For most paper records this will mean placing in clearly labelled folders in appropriately sized, clean cardboard boxes. Old, fragile or particularly important records should be stored with special care so that they will remain well-organised, clean and in good condition. Photos can be put in acid-free storage containers, or just kept in an envelope. (Avoid the albums with the sticky backs and clear film over the top – they are very bad for the photographs.)

Carefully label photographs with the year they were taken, names of people and/or other relevant information. (Older parishioners can be a wonderful resource for identifying who is in the photos.)

10. Label boxes clearly. Store them in a logical order, in a suitable location. Keep a good copy of your final listing. This will make finding things easier when needed.
11. Records or artefacts that don't need to be kept can be thoughtfully disposed of – eg secure disposal, recycling, returning items to original owners or family members, etc.

STORAGE CONDITIONS FOR ARCHIVAL RECORDS

The storage for your archival records should be:

- accessible but also secure
- dry (beware of humidity and also standing, running or dripping water)
- low light levels
- cool and even temperature
- safe from pests (moths, silverfish, millipedes, etc)
- safe from fire
- safe from theft or misappropriation (this does occasionally happen, sadly), and from accidental damage or loss
- safe from disposal or destruction (by tidy housekeepers or thoughtless managers, or by accident)

A lockable cupboard next to an interior wall in the parish office is often the best choice.

LONG TERM STORAGE FOR PARISH RECORDS

It can be challenging to provide adequate storage conditions in the parish. Acknowledging these difficulties, the Diocese of Adelaide encourages parishes to consider sending the following records to the Diocesan Archives Office:

1. Old registers (baptism, confirmation, marriage, burial)
2. Vestry record books older than 25 years
3. Annual Vestry minutes and reports older than 25 years
4. Parish Council minutes older than 25 years

These will be transferred to the State Library of South Australia for permanent storage there. At the State Library they are kept in optimal conditions in the Anglican record group (SRG 94), where there is a unique number for every parish/church. Although they are permanently deposited at the library, these records remain the property of the Church. They are not a donation to the library.

Other archival records can also be transferred to the State Library for permanent storage. In some circumstances, parish archival records can be transferred to the Diocesan Archives to be preserved and stored in-house. The Diocesan Archivist can advise further.

WHEN A CHURCH IS CLOSING DOWN

Records will be one of the most important long-term legacies of a parish, so planning for their future is important when a parish is nearing closure.

Archival records of closing churches should be transferred to the Diocesan Archives Office. Often parishioners like to take some records with them when parishes amalgamate, to help carry the culture and memory of an old congregation into a new one. This is a good idea for recent photographs, copies of parish histories and parish memorabilia. **However**, the archival records of the closed church (registers, minutes, etc) should not be sent on to any other church. Experience shows they often end up being misplaced or discarded.

To ensure that parish records are properly preserved:

1. Make an inventory listing all records, artefacts (including valuables) and memorials.
2. Take photos of all artefacts and memorials, and note relevant details as needed.
3. Does the parish have a time capsule lodged in the building or grounds? If so, it is time to extract it and add it to the archives.
4. Contact the Diocesan Archivist to discuss your archives and what needs doing.
5. Using the advice in this leaflet on dealing with parish records, identify important permanent records and put them in labelled boxes, with a list (cardboard archival crates are good, ordinary smaller cardboard boxes are also ok if clean).
6. Contact the Diocesan Archivist and arrange to transfer your listed and boxed records to Diocesan Archives. The Archives Office will act as a clearing house before moving appropriate parts of the records on to State Library.

If in doubt, needing further advice, or wishing to arrange a transfer of records, please contact the Diocesan Archivist, Sarah Black: (08) 8305 9316 or archives@adelaideanglicans.com