Church Records - what to keep?

## Why keep records?

There are at least two valuable reasons for recording information about the past:

1. administrative and legal requirements: recording events, decisions, finances etc.
2. historical recollection: recording the events of the past for the memory of the church.

## What records should be kept?

* Minutes of parish and congregational meetings
* Minutes and reports of the management committee (Parish Council, Church Council, Executive, Elders etc.)
* Minutes of all committees and groups (Worship, Evangelism, Women's, Men's, Youth, Sunday School, Property etc.)
* Selected correspondence of all committees and groups
* Annual reports (congregation, committees, groups)
* Registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages & burials
* 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, pastors, members, special occasions)
* Building plans
* Financial records

##### Minutes

The full name of the congregation or committee should appear at the top of the minutes of each meeting. The date and year of the meeting should be included.

##### Printed or electronic copy?

Electronic (or digital) storage changes frequently. Can floppy disks of the 1990s still be accessed? Will CDs be accessible in 2030?

Printed copies (pasted in books or loose sheets in folders) are best: don't use sticky tape to put sheets in books. (It dries, stains the paper and the sheets become loose.) Use paper glue (white PVA glue).

##### 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.

##### Registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages & burials

These are valuable records and are frequently needed in the future (baptism records are needed for confirmations, baptism records are needed for marriages in Catholic and Orthodox churches, for obituaries, and for church statistics).

They should be kept up-to-date. They should never be destroyed. (Do not delete these digital records.)

If you have these records on a computer program, at the end of each year print a copy of the events for the year and keep this in a folder.

##### Newsletters (regular, monthly, quarterly etc.)

A copy should be posted to the Lutheran Archives for permanent retention – put Lutheran 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 (constitutions, property titles, employment contracts)

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).

##### 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.

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, chequebook butts, invoices, receipts, collection books, cash books, etc. beyond the 7 year legal requirement.

## How to store the 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.

## How Lutheran Archives can help

Lutheran Archives was set up to ensure that the history of our church and its records were safely kept. The Archives building is temperature-controlled, our fire alarms are directly connected to the fire brigade, and we are protected by a security system.

We encourage you to deposit older and non-current records at Lutheran Archives for safekeeping. They still belong to the congregation and can be retrieved by the congregation at any time. Congregations frequently ask the Lutheran Archives for historical information, but the Archives can only supply the information if it has been saved and sent there for safekeeping.

Deposit your registers of baptisms, confirmations, marriages and burials when they are old, and the Archives can make a photocopy for the congregation.

For advice on keeping your congregation's records, contact:

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