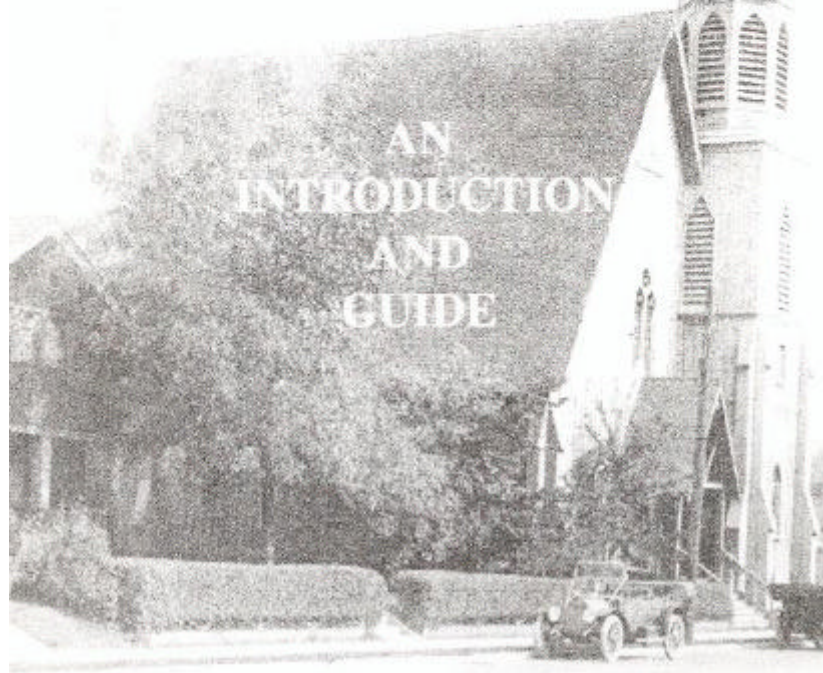


Archives and Records Management for Congregations



Archives and Records Management
Diocese of Olympia

St. Luke's, Vancouver (front cover)

Destroyed by fire December 6, 1931 (back cover)

Photos courtesy of the Diocese of Olympia Archives

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The purpose of this publication is to provide an introduction to the basic principles and procedures relating to the creation and maintenance of archives and records management programs for congregations. This is not a complete archives and records management manual, but is meant to be a resource for basic questions and concerns regarding active, inactive, and historical records. The following process is advised when the decision has been made to establish an archives and records management program in a congregation. It is highly recommended that the diocesan archivist/records manager be contacted when developing such a program.

INTRODUCTION

A records management program is necessary for legal, administrative and fiscal reasons. Records management is the application of systematic control to the creation, organization, maintenance and disposition of the records. An effective records management program will ensure that unnecessary records are not created, that necessary records are maintained and used effectively, that records which have served their purpose are disposed of properly, that vital and confidential records are protected and that all records with permanent value are identified and transferred to the congregation's archives for care and preservation.

Individual congregations are not required to have an archives but it is highly recommended that an area be set aside where non-current records with permanent value may be appropriately stored. Such materials document the growth and history of the congregation and are generally impossible to replace if damaged or lost.

Examples of materials usually contained in a church archives include correspondence, meeting minutes, memoranda and reports created to support daily business transactions, and records that document the legal status of the congregation. Bulletins, newsletters, directories, architectural plans, histories, etc. should also be included. In addition to the written record, archives may also contain artifacts (e.g., altar linens, vestments, liturgical objects), photographic materials and items in a variety of audio, visual and electronic formats that illustrate the nature and development of the church community.



The Busy Bees, St John's, Olympia 1873. Eliza Leary, seated at right.

A basic records management and archives program for a congregation should include:

- A **policy statement** which defines the purpose and scope of the program, assigns responsibility for its administration, and provides authority for the program's operation.
- A **records retention schedule** which establishes guidelines for retaining, storing, and destroying records in accordance with the administrative, legal, fiscal, and historical needs of the congregation and with records retention policies adopted by the Diocese of Olympia.
- A **standardized filing system** with documented procedures on what to file, how to file, and where to file all records created and maintained by the congregation.
- A **set of procedures** for storing, protecting, retrieving and destroying records in an appropriate and legally acceptable manner which respects the confidentiality, integrity, and historical interests and professional concerns of the congregation, its members and the Diocese.

POLICY STATEMENT

A records management and archives program in a congregation must have adequate support and resources to succeed. Establishing and maintaining a program requires organization and planning, as well as staff, monetary commitment and support from administration. It is recommended that a records management and archives policy be created in order to clearly outline the scope and content of the program and that the vestry or bishop's committee be involved in the process and approve the final document. The following is a sample policy statement that may be adapted to particular needs:

Sample Policy Statement:

The purpose of the archives of (Name of Congregation) is to collect, organize, preserve, and make available for research, the official records of (Name of Congregation). The purpose of the records management program is to assure that the active and inactive records of (Name of Congregation) are managed in a manner in keeping with the standards of the records management profession, and to assure the transfer of the appropriate records to the archives. The archives and records management program is approved by the vestry (or bishop's committee) of (Name of Institution) and is established in accordance with the archives and records management policies of the Diocese of Olympia.

NOTE: The above sample policy statement has been abbreviated. Please contact the Archivist/Records Manager for a more complete version.



Laying of the cornerstone, St. Paul's Bellingham. Sept. 27, 1925

PROGRAM OUTLINE

After the approval of the records management and archives policy, the process of developing a records management program and establishing an archives will initially require additional staff time, and resources. This process can be taken in the following steps:

- Locate all records, from sacramental registers to canceled checks.
- Create an inventory or list of the records. The inventory should include the name of the file or record, the date range of materials in the file, and the location of the file or record. Also note the format of the record, the condition of the record and whether or not it is of a **vital** or **confidential** nature.
- Use the inventory to provide a basis for future decisions, such as creating retention schedules, revising current filing practices, determining procedures and appraising records.
- Consider the following criteria for appraisal when making decisions about the value and disposition of records: Administrative use; legal importance; fiscal value; historical significance; intrinsic value; and canonical requirements.
- Determine which records are active, inactive, or archival. Active records are records necessary for current business, or those referenced on a daily basis. Inactive records are referenced fewer than 10 times per year or those records that are required to be kept for a short period of time (such as many financial records). Archival records are those determined to be of permanent value.

ARCHIVAL ARRANGEMENT AND DESCRIPTION

Records which have been determined to be of permanent value should be separated from the other records and placed in the archives so that proper care may be taken to preserve and protect them for as long as possible. Care should also be taken to protect their provenance (creating office or individual) and original order. In general, the purpose of

the arrangement of records in the archives of a congregation is to reflect the functional organization of that congregation.

For example: Trinity Parish
Administration Office
Correspondence, 1980-1985

If there is no arrangement to the records, they are to be arranged according to congregation, creating body or office (usually indicates function), type of record, and date: St. Luke's, Altar Guild, Minutes, 1935-1940. It may be necessary to provide further identification or description depending on the nature of the record.

While arranging the records, create an inventory which lists the title of each file folder, its location, and the date range of the contents of the file. Keep this inventory in the archives and update it as additional materials are received. Though not required, it would be helpful for the diocesan archives to have a copy of this inventory as well.

PRESERVATION

It is vital that the process used to preserve and protect materials does not harm them, and that what is done can always be undone! Archival records are to be kept in a stable environment where the temperature does not fluctuate. Allowing that the ideal environment for archival records is difficult to achieve, the following basic steps are recommended to preserve these materials:

- Food and beverages are not allowed in the processing area or in the archives.
- Pencils are to be used for notations and labels.
- White cotton gloves are to be worn when handling textiles and photographs.
- Acid free folders and acid free boxes are to be used for storing archival materials.
- Acid free paper is to be used to interleave photographs or they are to be stored in individual acid free envelopes.

ELECTRONIC RECORDS

The shelf life of electronic formats such as diskettes, tapes or CDs is relatively short and they should not be kept in the archives. However, some records created or stored in electronic formats may be archival. Any electronic records determined to be of permanent value are to be printed out and kept in paper format in the archives.

SECURITY

The archives of a congregation may be located in any of a number of places such as a vault in the parish office or a fireproof filing cabinet in the church library. The archives may not be located in the home of an individual or staff member or in any space separate from the church building. A neutral and secure environment is necessary for the preservation and security of the materials in the archives.

ACCESS

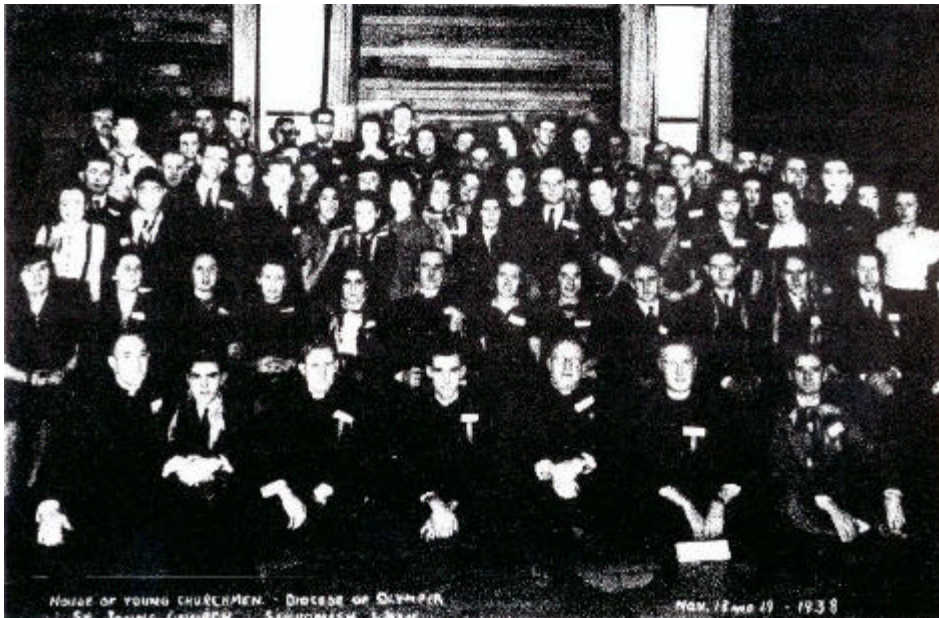
Records created by and for employees of a congregation belong to that congregation and not to the individual. The majority of records created during the course of conducting

business are not considered confidential, but at the same time are not open to general research for 30 years after the creation of the record. *However, there are many records of a congregation that are confidential in nature These records include - but are not limited to - parish/sacramental registers, marriage records, donor files, and counseling or medical records. Access to these records is legally and canonically restricted, and the privacy of the Christian faithful and the confidentiality of the records must be protected.* Particular care must be taken of these records and they are to be kept in a secure, fireproof, locking filing cabinet, safe or room.

It is recommended that access to these records by pastoral or other staff be kept to a minimum. Sacramental records should not be used to compile membership lists. This type of information should be gathered and kept in other formats or ways. Policies relating to access to confidential records are available from the diocesan archivist.

WORKSHOPS AND RESOURCES

The diocesan archivist/records manager should be contacted when a congregation establishes a records management and archives program. The archivist/records manager is available to answer questions relating to archives and records or information management. Workshops and other training opportunities can be arranged on-site in order to meet the particular needs of a congregation. Education and resources are available regarding the establishment and maintenance of records management programs, including the creation of filing systems and records retention schedules; and the creation, implementation and maintenance of archives in congregational settings.



House of Young Churchman, St. John's Snohomish. November, 1938

RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULES

A records retention schedule identifies individual offices, lists the records created or maintained by that office, and establishes the period of time the record is to be kept and

Type of Record**Retention****Financial Records**

Audit Reports	P
Accounts Payable (See also: Invoices)	CY + 6
Accounts Receivable	CY + 6
Bank Deposit Slips	CY + 6
Check Registers	CY + 6
Check Copies/Stubs	CY + 6
Donor List	P
General Ledger	P
Invoices & Paid Bills (Capital)	P
Invoices & Paid Bills (Non-capital)	CY + 6
Journal Entries	CY + 6
Payroll Journal	P
Pledge Envelopes	Audit + 1
Pledge Records - Monthly/Quarterly	CY + 6
Pledge Register - Summary of Annual Giving	P
Tax Exemption (Parish)	P
Tax Forms (e.g. 1099, W2)	CY + 6
Etc.	

Memorabilia

Pamphlets	P
Programs	P
Scrapbooks	P
Etc.	

Personnel Records (2)

Accident & Injury Reports	Claim settlement + 6
Employee Files	ACT + 7
Immigration & Naturalization 1-9 Form	ACT + 6
Time Cards	CY + 6
Worker's Compensation Claims & Filings	Claim settlement + 6
W2 Form	CY + 6
W4Form	CY + 6
Etc.	

Photographs (3)

Activities	P
Church Buildings	P
Personnel	P
Etc.	

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