

§900 SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

Introduction

Some of the most important sources for understanding this historical identity are parochial sacramental registers of Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, Death and First Communion. These books are an invaluable record of the people who made up a parish, and collectively the Diocese, at a given time. They are of vital interest not only to the Church, but also to countless individuals and even whole communities. Their value is acknowledged in both civil and canon law.

The following policy and attendant procedures are based partly on the provisions of canon law and Diocesan policies, and partly on questions that have been addressed nationally and locally concerning the creation, preservation and use of sacramental records. This policy is meant to provide some practical norms for parish use and is not intended as a complete statement of all the issues raised in canon law, civil law and archival practice.

§901 SACRAMENTAL RECORDS POLICY

§901.1. Ownership

901.1.1 Policy The ownership and copyrights of all Roman Catholic Sacramental Records for parishes, agencies or institutions within the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Springfield in Illinois reside with the Diocese.¹

§901.2. Delegation to Person in Charge

901.2.1. Policy The Bishop delegates to the "person in charge" (whether pastor, chaplain or administrator), the responsibility for ensuring that the sacramental records of the Diocese are kept in accordance with these policies and attendant procedures.²

§901.3. Responsibilities of Person in Charge

¹See Appendix I. "Ownership and Responsibility."

²See Appendix I. "Ownership and Responsibility."

901.3.1 Policy It is the responsibility of the "person in charge" to ensure the following:

- (1) that sacramental records are properly maintained and kept in accordance with established Diocesan procedures;³
- (2) that sacramental records are clearly and promptly annotated;⁴
- (3) that sacramental records are properly preserved;⁵
- (4) that access to sacramental records is in compliance with accepted Diocesan procedures.⁶

§901.4. Inspection

901.4.1. Policy All Sacramental Registers shall be inspected biennially by the area Dean (Vicar Foranae) and certified as inspected with an appropriate seal, signature and date of inspection.⁷

³See §902 "Procedures for the Creation of Sacramental Records and their Annotations."

⁴See §902 "Procedures for the Creation of Sacramental Records and their Annotations."

⁵See §903 "Procedures for Preservation of Sacramental Records "

⁶See §904 "Procedures for Access to Sacramental Records."

⁷See Appendix I. "Ownership and Responsibility."

APPENDIX I

OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

1. **Copyright.** Ownership of copyrights for all sacramental records of parishes, schools and institutions under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Springfield in Illinois rests with the Diocese.
2. **Responsibility.** The creation, preservation and use of sacramental records are the responsibility of the person in charge, whether pastor, chaplain or administrator. (C. 535/1)
3. **Missions.** A pastor who also has charge of a mission church is obliged to maintain for that church a separate set of sacramental registers.
4. **Institutions.** Catholic institutions (hospitals, special homes, etc.) which are shown by decree to maintain their own sacramental records shall continue to do so. Persons assigned as chaplains or parish priests with sacramental responsibilities for Catholic or non-Catholic institutions which maintain no distinctly Catholic sacramental registers shall see to it that the reception of the sacraments of baptism, marriage, confirmations and first communions, as well as a register of those received into full Communion, be recorded in the sacramental registers of the territorial parish in which the hospital/institution is located. These sacraments shall not be recorded in the parish to which the priest is assigned if it is not the territorial parish. If a Catholic institution closes or combines with another institution in a manner that precludes the maintenance of specifically Catholic sacramental records, the records shall be discontinued and transferred to the Diocesan Archives. All future sacraments performed at that location shall then be recorded in the registers of the territorial parish.
5. **Delegated Responsibility.** The person in charge may choose to delegate the day-to-day administration of these records to a parish secretary or another responsible person. Only the person in charge, or their chosen delegate, may handle the sacramental registers. The registers may not be handled or viewed by other individuals.
6. **Certification of Registers.** If the person in charge does not personally make entries in the registers, the records shall at least be certified by his/her signature and dated at the foot of each page. All parish sacramental registers shall be inspected biennially by the area Dean (Vicar Foranae) and certified as inspected with the appropriate seal, signature and date of inspection. A Certificate of Inspection form (provided by the Director of the Office for Archives and Records Management), documenting the inspection shall be sent to the Office for Archives and Records Management by the appropriate Dean (Vicar Foranae).
7. **Non-Transferable.** Under no pretext may anyone take with him/her any parochial books, including sacramental registers, when he/she leaves the parish, school, or institution or is transferred to another assignment. Outside of the legitimate access

described in §904 *Procedures for Access to Sacramental Records*, neither the originals nor any copies of sacramental registers, nor the data they contain, whether on microfilm or otherwise, can ever be given, loaned or sold to any person or institution without the written permission of the Chancellor or Director of the Office for Archives and Records Management. This permission, if granted, shall specify the conditions for use, duplication and/or publication.

§902 PROCEDURES FOR THE CREATION OF SACRAMENTAL REGISTERS AND THEIR ANNOTATION

§902.1. Registers In General

902.1.1. Required Registers. Each parish shall keep the following sacramental registers: Baptismal, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage and Death. (C. 535/1, 895) Each sacramental register shall include the name of the parish, the comprehensive dates for the register and shall be indexed. Although computer storage may supplement the registers for reference or statistical purposes, it is not an acceptable replacement for the books themselves.

902.1.2. Permanent Bindings, Paper, Ink. Since the registers are meant for permanent preservation, the bindings and paper shall be of a quality that is considered permanent, durable and acid-free (i.e., non-yellowing). The ink that is used shall also be of a permanent quality. Only black ink shall be used. The best types of inks are those made for art work or India inks (usually found in cartridges). A black ball-point pen is acceptable. Felt-tip pens, gel pens and pencils are not acceptable.

902.1.3. Accuracy and Legibility. Since the registers are kept for future reference as legal proof (canonical and civil) of church events, age and/or nationality status, it is necessary that the entries be made promptly, accurately and legibly. For this reason, entries, except for signatures, shall be printed rather than written out in cursive. An inaccurate or illegible record is a great future disservice to the persons involved and to their families.

902.1.4. Corrections, Additions, Deletions. One of the tests for the validity of a record as legal proof is whether it has been officially kept and whether there have been any alterations. For this reason, the proper way to correct a factual error (i.e., a name or date) is to add a notation and not to erase or cross out what someone claims is incorrect. The notation must be based on some written proof of error (this proof should be identified in the notation area). A photocopy should be made of the proof and placed in a permanent folder. This folder is to be maintained by the parish, school or institution for the documentary proof used to change the original entry or to add a missed entry. This folder should not include regular notations (e.g. Declarations of Nullity and notifications of sacraments). In case of a technical or incidental error (i.e., spelling, date out of sequence, etc.) which is obvious to the "person in charge" once it is pointed out, a change in the original entry may be made without the need for the notation or proof. (C. 876) In cases of doubt, the Diocesan Archivist shall be consulted.

§902.2. Baptismal Registers

902.2.1. In General. The baptismal register shall record the following information for each baptism: the name, date and place of birth of the baptized; the name of the minister of the sacrament; the names of the parents (including mother's maiden name), sponsor(s) and witness(es); and the date and place (if outside the parish) of the conferred baptism. (C. 877)

- (i) A birth certificate must be presented by the parents in order for the child to be baptized. The information recorded in the baptism registers (birth date, birth place, and parent(s)'s name(s)) must agree with the birth certificate. Pastoral discretion may allow the pastor/administrator to forgo the demand of a birth certificate for a family of long standing in the parish.
- (ii) Insofar as possible, a person is to be baptized with a sponsor. Canon law requires no more than two sponsors/godparents, one of each sex. Additional honorary sponsors/godparents may be appointed by the parent(s) but should not be recorded in the sacramental register. (C. 873, 877)

902.2.2. Routine Notations. The baptismal register serves as the "master record" for a person's membership in the Church. (C. 535/2) Notations concerning other sacraments received later in life are to be entered there: Confirmation, Marriage(s) (including convalidations), reception of Holy Orders, perpetual profession in religious institute, and change of rite. Notations of Declaration of Nullity (and prohibitions on future marriages), laicization and dispensation from vows shall also be entered when requested officially by the appropriate authorities.

902.2.3. Professions of Faith. The names of persons who are baptized Christians and who enter into full communion with the Catholic Church by means of a profession of faith shall be recorded in the parish baptismal register under the date of profession, together with the date and place of baptism of the party, and all other information as required in §902.2.1. *Baptismal Registers In General*, above. (N.B. The names of catechumens shall be recorded in the parish register of catechumens, after the "Rite of Acceptance into the Order of Catechumens," along with the names of the sponsors and the minister and the date and place of the celebration. Once the elect receive the sacrament of initiation, their name shall be recorded in the baptismal register as set forth in §902.2.1. *Baptismal Registers In General*, above, and notations shall be recorded in the confirmation and communion registers.)

902.2.4. Illegitimacy. If a child is born of an unmarried mother, the name of the mother is to be inserted in the baptismal register if there is public proof of her maternity (i.e., a civil birth record) or if she declares this either in writing by a notarized letter/statement or before two witnesses. Likewise, the name of the father shall be inserted in the register if his paternity has been proved either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses. If these conditions are not met, the child is to be recorded as being of "Unknown Mother" or "Unknown Father," in Latin "mater ignota" or "pater ignotus". (C. 877/2) It is not permitted to make an annotation that says "Illegitimate."

902.2.5. Adoption. Baptism shall be postponed until after the child has been placed with the adopting parent(s), except in extraordinary circumstances such as a serious threat of imminent death. This is with the understanding that the postponement will be for a relatively

short time only. Baptisms of children legally in the care of same-sex parents shall be handled in the same manner.

(i) Children baptized *after* their adoption is finalized.

The following information shall be entered in the register:

- † the Christian name of the child as designated by the adopting parent(s);
- † the name of the adopting parent(s);
- † the date and place of birth;
- † the names of the sponsors selected by the adopting parent(s); and
- † the name of the minister performing the baptism.
- † the fact of the adoption, but not the names of the natural parents

Baptismal certificates for adopted children issued by the parish will be no different than other baptismal certificates. No mention of the fact of the adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate.

(ii) Children baptized *before* their adoption was finalized.

The following notations shall be added to the baptismal register, but only after the adoption has been finalized:

- † parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parents;
- † the names of the adopting parent(s) shall then be added;
- † the child's former name shall also be parenthesized and the new name added;
- † a notation shall be made that the child was adopted, together with the name of the court or agency, date of adoption and case number. As well as the birth certificate, the parent(s) must submit the adoption papers.

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these individuals shall give only the name(s) of the adopting parent(s), the child's new legal name, the date and place of baptism, and the name of the minister who conferred the sacrament. *The name(s) of the sponsor(s) shall not be given and the notation of adoption in the register shall not be entered on any baptismal certificate.*

For future ease in reference after the adoption has been finalized, a baptismal entry for the adoptive child can be made in the baptismal register of the adoptive parents' parish, citing the date and location of the original baptismal record, and listing only the names of the adoptive parents, the date and place of birth. Only the original church of baptism may issue the baptism certificate and record notations.

Parish personnel having valid access to parish registers have an obligation not to disclose to any person any information that would identify or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that a person was adopted.

902.2.6. Supporting Documents. Certain notations in the baptismal register are accompanied by legal documents that serve as evidence and should also be preserved. Examples include adoption documents proving paternity; affidavits concerning previously omitted baptisms; and notarized court and governmental documents concerning name and/or date changes. These items shall never be glued, stapled or paper clipped into the actual register. After

the appropriate notations are made, these items shall be kept in a separate file corresponding to each register and page number. The file shall be referred to in the notation. The file shall be kept permanently.

902.2.7. *Outside Clergy or People.* When a priest or deacon baptizes in a parish church to which he is not assigned, the pastor or person in charge is responsible for the filing of the necessary records. The baptism shall be recorded in the parish where the baptism took place. If the family is registered in a parish other than the one in which the baptism took place, the baptism is to be recorded in the church where the sacrament was celebrated. Only the parish of baptism may issue certificates and record notations.

§902.3. Confirmation Registers

The names of the confirmed, the parents, the sponsors, the minister; the place and date of the conferral of confirmation; and the place and date of baptism are to be noted in the confirmation register of the parish. A notice must also be sent to the church of baptism indicating the name of the recipient; date and place of confirmation; and the name of conferring bishop/dean/pastor so that a notation may be made in the baptismal register. (C. 895)

§902.4. Marriage Registers

902.4.1. *In General.* All marriages (including marriages convalidated in the external forum) are to be entered in the marriage register. The following items are to be noted: the names of the spouses, the priest or deacon who assisted and the witnesses, the place and date of the marriage celebration, and any pertinent notation (i.e., date and place of baptism). (C.1121)

- (i) In the case of a convalidation, a recent copy of the marriage license is needed. The register should list the date of convalidation in the Church. The status of convalidation and the date of the original marriage shall be entered in the notation section. It is also necessary to retain the pre-nuptial file permanently in the parish archives.
- (ii) In the case of radical sanation, a recent copy of the marriage license is needed. The marriage register shall list the date of the original marriage and the date radical sanation is granted, with a notation indicating that sanation was granted by the Diocese. A note should be made in the baptismal records of each party when radical sanation is granted. It is also necessary to retain the pre-nuptial file in the parish marriage case files. (C. 1161-1165)

902.4.2. *Notations.* The following notations are to be entered in the marriage record: permission or dispensation received from impediments; the delegation given to assist at marriage; a decree of dissolution or nullity; and any restrictions on future marriages.

Whenever a rescript is involved, the name of the diocese, congregation, or tribunal, etc., which issues the rescript shall be noted, together with the date and the protocol number if one is provided. (For dispensations from canonical form, see §902.7.1. *Celebrations Outside a Parish*)

Church Building. (ii) *Marriage*, below.) The pastor of the parish in which the marriage has taken place must forward this information as soon as possible to the pastor of the parish where each party was baptized (C.1122) or to the Archdiocese for the Military Services, if required.

§902.5. Death Registers

A bound register shall be used as suggested in §902.1.1. *Required Registers* and §902.1.2. *Permanent Bindings, Paper, Ink.*, above. Burial permit books do not satisfy the conditions of a permanent register. The registers shall be chronologically arranged by date of parishioner death. It shall include the date of anointing, name of anointing priest and date and place of burial/ cremation. Additional information may include name of funeral home, next of kin and cause of death (if known).

§902.6. First Communion Registers

These registers shall be kept, and shall include the names of the first communicant and parents as found on the baptismal certificate; the place and date of baptism; and the date of reception of the sacrament.

§902.7. Special Circumstances

902.7.1. Celebrations Outside a Parish Church Building. When sacraments are administered in places other than a parish church building, in accordance with Diocesan norms, it is important that the records not be "lost" in an unexpected place and be retrievable for future reference:

- (i) **Baptism:** Baptism shall be recorded at the parish whose territory encompasses the location at which the sacrament was celebrated, *unless the place of baptism is a Catholic institution which has received permission from the Chancery to maintain its own sacramental records.*
- (ii) **Marriage:** When the wedding takes place according to canonical form, the sacramental records shall be entered and kept at the territorial parish within the boundaries of which the wedding was celebrated, *unless the place of marriage is a Catholic institution which has received permission from the Chancery to maintain its own sacramental records.* In the case of a wedding celebrated with a dispensation from canonical form, the marriage shall be recorded in two places. (C.1121/3): (1) in the parish of the Catholic party whose pastor prepared the couple for marriage and requested the dispensation (or at least gave permission for another priest to do so); and (2) in the Chancery of the diocese which granted the dispensation from canonical form. The pre-nuptial files shall be kept in the parish where the wedding took place. The priest who requested the dispensation is responsible for sending the usual notification of marriage to the parish of baptism of the Catholic party or parties. He is also responsible for notifying the Chancery which granted the dispensation from canonical form if the marriage was not celebrated.
- (iii) **Death:** If, as a clergyman, a priest is called upon to preside at a non-Catholic burial, an entry can be made in the parish's death records together with a notation concerning the religion of the deceased and the services which were provided. All

Catholic funeral liturgies, even if celebrated outside the church building, shall be entered in the parish death records.

§902.8. Sacramental Certificates (C.535/3)

As an authenticated (i.e., signed and sealed) transcript of the original record, every certificate shall be accurate, legible (preferably typewritten or printed) and complete (including all notations except in cases of adoption as indicated above in §902.2.5. *Baptismal Registers: Adoption*. The absence of information to fit an item on the printed form shall be indicated by a line or the words "none" or "not given," rather than by leaving the space blank. It is also possible to issue a signed and sealed certificate without adding the notations. Certificates of this kind must be clearly marked with the words "FOR NON-SACRAMENTAL PURPOSES" since they are not sufficient to certify the canonical status of an individual.

§903 PROCEDURES FOR THE PRESERVATION OF SACRAMENTAL RECORDS**§903.1. Storage**

Sacramental registers are to be kept in a secure place (i.e., the parish safe) as well as stored and handled in an environment that ensures their preservation. (C.535, P's. 4 & 5) Ideally this means a constant cool temperature with a relative humidity of 40% to 50% and no prolonged exposure to sunlight or artificial light. While most parish offices cannot fulfill such precise requirements, steps can always be taken to avoid high temperatures, dampness and direct sunlight.

§903.2. Restoration

Registers that have been worn out by use and age can be rebound and restored, provided this work is done according to archival requirements. Rebinding that destroys any data or renders any part of the records unusable is not acceptable. For these reasons, the Director of the Office for Archives and Records Management shall be consulted before any rebinding or restoration work is undertaken.

§903.3. Copies

Sacramental registers can be protected from loss due to fire, age or heavy use by making duplicate copies in any one of several ways: transcripts, microfilm and digital image. Under no circumstances, however, shall the original register be discarded. For the purpose of providing security duplicate copies, the Diocese has undertaken a diocesan-wide digitization project of sacramental records which includes the periodic updating of the digital images. This project and any other steps taken on the parish level shall be regarded as a means of preservation, not free access or publication. The same restrictions of access apply to copies as to original records. (*cf.* §904 *Procedures for Access to Sacramental Records*, below). As with original records, no copies of sacramental records or the data they contain, whether on microfilm digital images or other form, may ever be given, loaned or sold to any person or institution without the written permission of the Bishop or his delegate, except, of course, for the legitimate access described in §904.1 below. Permission so granted will specify the condition for use, duplication and publication.

§903.4. Transfer to Diocesan Archives/Closed Parishes

The ordinary repository for sacramental registers is the parish that created them. In the event that a parish or institution does not have the facilities or the means to preserve their older book(s) or to handle the volume of research requests, the Diocesan Archives shall be contacted for a possible transfer of the registers to the Office for Archives and Records Management. In the event that a parish is closed, the registers and all other parochial records shall be surveyed by the Office for Archives and Records Management staff to determine appropriate retention periods. Sacramental registers shall be transferred by the Archives, after inventory, to the parish which assumes parochial responsibility for the majority of the closed parish's territory. (The Director of the Office for Archives and Records Management and the pastor or administrator of the closed parish shall designate which parish assumes parochial responsibility.) The registers shall remain in the parish that assumes parochial responsibility for three years and then be sent to the Office for Archives and Records Management which shall assume the responsibility for administering them.

In the case of merged/consolidated parishes, a new set of sacramental registers must be purchased. In the books for the parishes that were merged/consolidated, a notation must be made after the last entry stating that the parish has merged with other parishes and no new entries should be added.

§904 PROCEDURES FOR ACCESS TO SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

Preamble

Sacramental records are of a mixed nature: private and public. They are private in that they were created in circumstances presumed to be private and confidential. They are public in that they will stand in civil law as valid and authentic evidence when an appropriate civil record does not exist. They are not "public" in the sense that they are open to immediate examination and inspection by anyone for whatever reason.

Every person has the right to be furnished with an authenticated certificate of his/her own sacramental records. However, these records are not only of value to the persons named in the registers. Research (whether historical, genealogical, sociological, demographic, etc.) is also a valid reason for permitting access to these records, provided that the rules of access protect the legitimate right of privacy of the persons named in the registers. It is the responsibility of the Diocese, acting in and through the pastors of the various parishes, to supervise how these records are used, by whom and for what purposes.

The passage of time has a critical effect on the sensitivity of all records. As current events become historical events, the need for withholding them from use is reduced and in some cases, may eventually disappear entirely. For this reason older records may be made more broadly available to researchers, whereas recent records shall be more restricted from use. Check with the Office for Archives and Records Management for dates of open access. Access dates are available on the Office for Archives and Records Management website.⁸ The norms governing access to sacramental records (whether originals or copies) is as follows:

§904.1. Sacramental Records Included in Open Access Dates

All researchers seeking records for historical and/or genealogical research shall be referred to the Office for Archives and Records Management. Copies of all open sacramental records and cemetery records are on deposit there in order to relieve parish personnel of this responsibility, to preserve the originals from wear, and to ensure that researchers receive proper supervision and equal treatment. Since this convenient service is available, researchers should not use the original registers at the parish. These rules are designed to protect the legal rights and the exercise of responsibilities of all concerned, both civilly and canonically. Under no circumstances are sacramental registers to be removed from the parish premises.

§904.2. Sacramental Records After Open Access Dates

⁸ At this time, Baptism, First Communion and Confirmation records are open through December 31, 1920. Marriage records are open through December 31, 1950. Death records are open through December 31, 1975. Updated access dates will be published on the Office for Archives and Records Management website.

904.2.1. These records are not open to examination.

904.2.2. If a person is seeking his own record or has a legitimate reason to request another family member's records, the pastor or authorized parish personnel shall examine the registers and issue the required information either directly or by mail. If the requestor is not known to parish personnel, a signed request with proof of identification (photo ID) is required. If the request is in writing it must be signed and include the name of parents, date of birth and other pertinent information so that there is no doubt that the person requesting the information is entitled to receive it. A request for another family member's record is considered legitimate if the requestor is seeking a certificate on behalf of their minor child or for an infirm or incapacitated adult for whom the requestor shows proof of power of attorney. Requests for records of deceased individuals may only be released in cases of inheritance or citizenship issues. In those instances, the requestor must present a completed citizenship application along with the necessary birth and death certificates connecting the requestor to the deceased person or probate documents showing the requestor is the executor of the estate and the death certificate to show that the person in the requested record is deceased. Documents must be originals, certified copies, or notarized photocopies. All documentation will be returned.

904.2.3. The use of sacramental records, for scholarly research, should only be done on microfilm/digital copies at the Diocese of Springfield in Illinois Office for Archives and Records Management with permission of the Director of the Office for Archives and Records Management.

904.2.4. If because of the age and value of the parish records, the demands of researchers or if the proper care of the records becomes burdensome, the pastor should contact the Director of the Office for Archives and Records Management for a possible transfer of the registers to the Diocesan Archives where they can be more safely preserved and more easily administered.

§904.3. All Sacramental Records

904.3.1. Parishes should not charge any fees for providing information from sacramental registers. However, a minimum handling fee may be charged for issuing a certificate. (If hardship is claimed, fees should always be waived.)

904.3.2. Requests made by government or corporate agencies (i.e., Social Security Administration, Immigration, insurance companies, etc.) should be accompanied by a signed release by the person whose record is requested (or a legally qualified guardian) authorizing the release of the information.

904.3.3. Subpoenas and other court orders demanding that records be handed over should be accepted, but no records should be handed over to the server. In cases where the pastor has been served a subpoena, contact the Office of the Chancellor before responding.

904.3.4. Certificates issued directly to a parish or other church authority for purposes of a canonical investigation (i.e., pre-marital, Tribunal, etc.) shall be clearly marked "For Canonical Investigation Only," preferably with a red ink stamp.

