



concordia historical institute

Department of Archives and History of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
804 Seminary Place, Saint Louis, Missouri 63105-3014 · 314-505-7900
concordiahistoricalinstitute.org

RETRIEVE + RECORD + REFLECT + RECALL

“HOW SHOULD WE PRESERVE AND MAINTAIN OFFICIAL CHURCH DOCUMENTS?”

As a corporation the congregation becomes involved in the acquisition, maintenance and care of its legal documents and other papers vital to its ministry and to the safeguarding of its properties. This bulletin presents some guidelines with respect to the preservation, filing and maintenance of such official/legal documents and other materials and resources of vital concern and interest to the local parish.

I. Materials to be Preserved

A. All the materials that answer the question who, what, when, where and if possible the why of the local parish

B. The following documents must be preserved:

1. Copies of all constitutions, past and present, both of the congregation and of all its organizations
2. Copies of calls extended and accepted regarding pastors, teachers and other servants of the church (calls that have been declined need not be preserved)
3. Copies of the deeds and descriptions of the church properties, titles, leases, surveys, etc.
4. Contracts for the construction of church buildings and facilities, as well as contracts negotiating for special services; all plans, blueprints, specifications, drawings, etc., shall be included
5. Mortgages should be retained even after they have been retired. It is poor policy to burn them.
6. Articles of Incorporation and amendments
7. List of charter members
8. Copies of all transfers and cases of excommunication and discipline shall be permanently preserved
9. Annual list of all names of officers, boards and commissions

C. Other records often overlooked that should be preserved and filed systematically include:

1. Records of the official acts, especially for baptism,

confirmation, marriage, burial, accessions and releases

2. Minutes of the voters' meetings, church council, building committee and other important committees with the exception of the records currently in use that must remain in the possession of the respective secretaries

3. Official correspondence

4. Copies of reports of all the congregation's official committees and commissions, and also societies and auxiliary organizations

5. Non-current treasurer's records, including monthly and annual reports

6. Sunday bulletins, congregational newsletters, special congregational letters to the membership, orders of service and programs for special events

7. History of the congregation

8. Chronological, running account of the major events and activities in the congregation

9. Statistical and comparative account of major events and activities of the congregation

10. Educational institutional records including parish, weekday, Sunday school and special areas, such as records of teachers, enrollment, policies, textbooks, curricular offerings, tuition, confirmations

11. Photographs of churches, schools, pastors, teachers and other personnel and organizations making sure to identify by name, occasion, date and place (who, what, when, where)

12. Audio items indicating a way of life, tape recordings of special services, events, other oral and visual resources

13. Foreign language materials, which ought to be translated into English (see CHI Information Sheet #10)

II. How Should these Items be Preserved?

A. Fireproof filing cabinet, equipped with a lock, stored in an area **least affected** by heat, extremely dry tempera-

tures, high humidity or temperature fluctuations, should be provided. All of the above named items, including the ledgers for official acts, shall be filed in such a cabinet or room.

B. Minutes of official meetings of various types are best transcribed in legible hand on a permanent ledger. However if they are typewritten in loose-leaf form and several copies have been made, the original ought to be permanently bound at regular intervals of five to ten years.

Whether bound or in a permanent ledger an index should be prepared for the period and included in the same binding that could include: a complete list of officers and full-time personnel serving the congregation during the period included in the binding; a brief resume of the congregation's history or references to its major events; any external events and relationships which have affected the congregation should be recorded; and, administrative policies and resolutions would be helpful.

The index should recognize personnel, administration and policy resolution, building and physical property decisions, and worship resolutions. Each bound volume should be microfilmed. (see CHI Information Sheet series #19)

C. The ledgers containing the official acts shall be adequately identified on the spine and cover, numbering the books in numerical order and include the dates covered. These ought to be microfilmed when new ledgers are begun or at anniversary years. Copies of the microfilm should be stored at a second location, such as at the Concordia Historical Institute.

D. Certain collections will grow fast, such as Sunday bulletins (two sets) and other congregational serials, which ought to be bound in permanent form and adequately identified with an inscription on the spine.

E. Calls extended and accepted together with the cover letter shall be filed in folders in chronological order by the archivist who shall attach any additional information that may be necessary for understanding the local circumstances.

F. Blueprints and oversize documents shall be filed in either large rolls with internal support, adequately identified or in a separate blueprint file. Under no conditions should they be folded. Any additional information needed to understand these blueprints, drawings, plans and specifications should be added by the archivist.

G. All official correspondence shall be filed in acid-free folders. An alphabetical arrangement under normal conditions may be best. Care should be taken that this correspondence is filed by corporate entities, rather than by individuals who represent a corporation. As correspondence builds up, only the corporation will continue

to be relevant, not the individual. Further it is desirable to designate correspondence that has permanent value and slated for permanent retention, in contrast to correspondence which has only ephemeral value. At certain intervals a quick separation between the two types can be made and the ephemeral correspondence purged. After the file folders consume too much space in a file, portions of the older correspondence may be stored in Hollinger archive boxes and placed on open steel shelves. This is considerably cheaper than purchasing additional filing cabinets and ensures utilizing the filing cabinets for current records only.

H. Records shall be placed on a retention and destruction schedule. It has been estimated that more than half of contemporary records can ultimately be destroyed because they have no historical or legal value. (see CHI Information Sheet #2C)

I. Records shall be periodically inspected for atmospheric and vermin damage. Adequate safeguards and protective measures should be taken.

J. When repair or restoration is planned for documents, special care and consideration ought to be given to those procedures that have proven to be most satisfactory. Fumigation sometimes may be necessary. Materials should never be folded, but should always be flattened out. Care must be taken with old or brittle paper that was folded long ago and will most likely have to be humidified before unfolding is attempted.

K. Microfilm copies of the voter's minutes, official acts ledgers and other vital records should be prepared with the original negative and positive print sent to Concordia Historical Institute, the congregation retaining a positive for local use. This is for the congregation's own protection in case fire or some natural disaster should destroy the originals.

L. Vital records outlined above should never be permitted to be removed from the church premises. In certain cases, however, it may be more desirable for the local parish to store its vital records in the vault of a local bank. Generally speaking when congregations can install a vault with proper atmospheric controls it is considered superior to file all the resources of the congregation referred to in this bulletin in Hollinger archive boxes on open steel shelves in such a vault.

III. Cooperation with District and Synodical Deposits

A. In order to have the congregational archivist function and serve effectively and establish a vital link between congregation, district, and Synod, the congregational archi-

vist should remain in constant touch with both the district and Synod archives. He should transmit the congregational resources in duplicate to both the district archives (see the *Lutheran Annual*) and to Concordia Historical Institute, Department of Archives and History of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, 804 Seminary Place, St. Louis, MO 63105.

B. Among the items to be transmitted to both the district and synodical archives are:

1. Printed or manuscript histories of congregations
2. Special orders of service from ordinations, installations, burials, groundbreaking, dedications, anniversaries, etc.
3. Special bulletins or newsletters containing recent historical tidbits regarding the congregations (Concordia Historical Institute cannot maintain sets of Sunday bulletins)
4. Biographical material pertaining to pastors, teachers, lay leaders and their families (Genealogies are also welcome. The form, whether printed or manuscript, is immaterial.)
5. Local or regional Lutheran periodicals
6. Photographs of churches, schools, pastors and

teachers (Please identify the persons, dates and locations. Black and white photos are far superior to color for archival purposes.)

7. Museum objects, records of special services and events, audio and visual resources of district and synodical interest (see CHI Information Sheet #8)

C. State, county and local historical societies are also interested in obtaining printed congregational histories.

IV. Using the Archives

A. Anyone with a legitimate purpose should be permitted to use the archives. Some records should be restricted (e.g. records of a church discipline case should not be published or handled except by a very few people like the pastor and the elders).

B. When records are searched, the person doing research should use the documents in the same room or nearby, copying information needed but not removing the file or document. After use, the records should be immediately refiled, using care not to cause any damage.

C. The Records Committee of the congregation should establish the policies for access to materials.