



How to Care For Your Records

Where should the records be stored?

Some parishes have perfectly adequate facilities for keeping their archival records within the parish; the records are housed securely, and kept well away from casual browsers. Sometimes the records are physically housed in the Parish Office, the Vestry, the Rectory, or in the home of a concerned Churchwarden or parishioner. It is important that the Minister and Churchwardens are aware of the location and condition of the parish records, and that the Minister appoints a suitable person to be 'Honorary Archivist' for the parish / church.

The most confidential records should be kept in the parish safe. Only the Rector or his nominee should have the authority to grant access to the parish archival records.

In the light of recent privacy legislation, it is of great importance that access should be limited to authorised persons only. Records should be stored in a designated place where they can be retrieved easily but are safe from environmental dangers. It is crucial to protect older and more fragile records from damage by casual and unauthorised browsing. A locked cupboard in a secure office is an ideal environment in most parish offices.

Dangers which threaten archival records

Many environmental elements have a negative impact upon archival records. Parish record storage space should be away from light, dust, damp, heat, insects, water, and fire. A regular and periodic check of the archival records stored in your church/parish for deterioration is advised, including any locked cupboards.

Do not expose records to light more than necessary. Store them away from windows, and switch off lights when not in use.

Avoid storing records in areas likely to get dampness or hot. A stable temperature and a consistent humidity level is important, rather than an atmosphere that fluctuates often.

Keep the records stored away from water pipes or taps which may cause accidental water damage. Damp and mould can damage records, as well as food, drink and dirt. If your records have become mouldy, controlled and supervised exposure to sunlight for a few hours will help to kill the mould.

Storage within a metal cupboard, or within secure boxes on metal shelving is quite suitable. If the cupboard is made of wood, check the interior to make sure that there are no infestations of insects or wood-borers (which love to eat paper).

Insects eat dust, food scraps, and plant matter. Keeping the area clean will deter pests.



Paper records can be a fire hazard. Regularly have electrical circuits and outlets tested, and repair any damage or exposed wires. Keep flames away from the records storage.

Some paper records are more unstable than others. Older fax printouts, receipts, and carbonless copy paper can fade and become illegible. If any documents are beginning to deteriorate, photocopy them and keep the copy with the original to preserve the record's information for longer. Do not throw out any records because they are fragile.

In the event of a disaster

If vital records become damaged, contact the Diocesan Archivist for advice on what steps you can take to mediate some of the damage. If water is involved, it is important to remove any liquid but do not attempt to dry the damp paper yourself. Do not use any commercial glue or tape to repair records yourself.

If you take steps to secure the records, you can prevent a disaster.

Consider the length of time the record needs to be retained:
if the record must be kept permanently, it should be looked after well.

Suitable Boxes: the Type 1 Box

Archival records should be kept in suitable boxes. Archivists commonly use a box called the '**Type 1 Box**', which can be purchased from the Government Records Repository in Sydney. The GRR website provides contact details, prices, and assembly instructions (pictures with text) for the Type 1 Box. It is sturdy enough to provide suitable protection to the records and not fall apart during handling, and, when full, it is a suitable size and weight for the average person to lift.

Occupational Health & Safety guidelines should be observed when lifting boxes of volumes, files, and papers. In general, a box to be lifted and carried should not weigh over **16-20 kilograms**. The GRR make a larger Type 2 Box, which can be useful for storage or larger items, but care must be taken not to make the box too heavy. Albox make a Type 1 Box in polypropylene, which is good for areas where damp or water is a problem.

Commercially available 'Archive' boxes, such as those from Marbig and Officeworks, should be avoided. They are made of flimsy cardboard, the base of the box is weak, and the box is far too heavy to lift safely when full. These records are irreplaceable, and the boxes must be able to protect the records and transport them intact.

Tips

- It is important to remember that paper needs to 'breathe', for it takes up and releases moisture as the temperature and humidity levels change. Documents should NOT be wrapped in plastics or foil, as these materials will trap moisture and cause the growth of mould. However, 'oven bags' are suitable for storage,



because they are permeable membranes, and they allow the paper to 'breathe' in the same way as they allow food to 'breathe' in the oven.

- If you need to keep a pile of records together, instead of putting them in a plastic bag, consider using a flat cotton tape to tie the bundle. A narrow string is less preferable, due to the possibility of it tearing through the paper it is tied around.
- Boxes should not be over-filled or they will not close properly and will lose their shape.
- Oversize items that are too large for a box can be wrapped in paper to protect them environmental hazards.

Any other questions?

Please do not hesitate to contact the Diocesan Archivist to discuss the condition or storage of your parish records; to make arrangements for deposit of your records; or for any other advice or information you might require.

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