



PARISH RECORDS RETENTION GUIDELINES

I. INTRODUCTION

The *Records Retention Guidelines for Parish Records* were prepared in response to parishes' needs to establish control over routine records and to preserve records of permanent value. The list of records included is lengthy but not definitive. Each parish may have a series of records not mentioned here. Retention periods were devised based on Canon Law, state and federal statutes and practical parish realities. If questions arise regarding records-related issues, please contact the appropriate office at the Archdiocese for additional information.

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This short document does little to assist parishes in establishing more formal archives/records management programs. Such programs endeavor to systematically control records (regardless of format) from creation through preservation or destruction. They cover filing systems, file management, retention scheduling, appraisal, storage systems and more. While those issues are beyond the scope of this document, they may be issues that your parish will want to discuss. Please call the Archives for assistance.

Please note that these guidelines do not address the many different types of records generated by **parish schools** or the **Catechetical office**. These offices have promulgated retention policies specifically designed to deal with school records and Catechetical records.

[Schools Record Retention form 5125.1\(a\)](#)

[Catechetical Records Retention form 5125.3](#)

II. RECORDS RETENTION SCHEDULES

Records retention schedules represent the period of time that records must be kept according to legal and/or organizational requirements.

This document covers retention schedules for seven different groups of parish records:

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|-------------------|-----------------|
| A. Sacramental | E. Property |
| B. Administrative | F. Cemetery |
| C. Personnel | G. Publications |
| D. Financial | |

Within each group different series are listed followed by a retention period. Records older than the retention period should be destroyed. Those of permanent value should be stored appropriately.

We have tried to list the majority of types of records that parishes produce. If you have a series of records not listed here, try to find records in the list that are similar and apply that retention period or call the Archdiocesan Archives.

A. Sacramental Records

Record Type	Retention Period
Baptism Register	Permanent
Confirmation Register	Permanent
First Communion Register	Permanent
Death Register	Permanent
Marriage Register	Permanent
Marriage case files	Permanent

B. Administrative Records

These records are produced in the course of the management of the affairs of the parish.

Record Type	Retention Period
Abstracts, deeds (property)	Permanent
Annual reports to Chancery (<i>Status Animarum</i>)	Permanent
Annual reports to the parish	Permanent
Articles of incorporation & bylaws	Permanent
Bequest and estate papers (<i>wills</i>)	Permanent
Census records	Permanent
Contracts, inactive	7 years after end of contract
Correspondence, legal	Permanent

Administrative Records – Continued

Record Type	Retention Period
Correspondence, official <i>(Re: Parish policies, diocesan directives, etc.)</i>	Permanent
Correspondence, routine	Review/discard annually
Donor lists	Permanent
Endowment decrees	Permanent
Finance Committee minutes <i>(including notes sent to parish council)</i>	Permanent
Historical file <i>(Newspaper clippings, photos, etc. related to parish)</i>	Permanent
Insurance policies	Permanent
Inventories of property & equipment	Permanent
Leases	Destroy 7 years after expiration.
Liturgical minister's schedules <i>(Altar servers, ushers, lectors, etc.)</i>	Retain until superseded.
Mass intention books	Two years
Office files, subject	Selective retention -- Retain those that Document parish administration and activities.
Parish council constitutions	Retain until superseded.
Parish council minutes	Permanent
Parish Organization records <i>(Minutes, correspondence, publications, etc.)</i>	Permanent
Photographs <i>(relating to parish history, clergy, parishioners)</i>	Permanent
Policy statements	Permanent
Religious education reports <i>(for the diocesan offices)</i>	Permanent
Rosters of parishioners	Permanent
Subject files <i>Correspondence, memos, rules, schedules, etc.)</i>	Annual review. Destroy superseded filed.
Wills, testaments, codicils	Permanent

C. PERSONNEL RECORDS

These records are often a mystery to both the employer and the employee. Employees often think that all kinds of personal information is filed away, just waiting for the moment when it can be used against them. Employers are never quite certain about what should be saved and what should be discarded.

A personnel file should be maintained for each active parish employee. That file should contain:

- Employee application
- Resume
- Eligibility verification form (I-9)
- Salary information
- Sick leave taken and accrued
- Vacation record
- Performance evaluations

These records are **confidential** and should be made available only to parish representatives with a legitimate right to know, unless their disclosure is compelled by some legal action. In Wisconsin, employees and former employees have the right to inspect their own personnel files. The parish/organization/employer has the right to require that the request be in writing and has seven working days to comply with the request.

Again, in Wisconsin, several items likely to be in a personnel file are specifically *excluded* from mandatory inspection:

- investigation of criminal offenses
- reference letters
- test documents
- materials dealing with staff management planning
- personal information concerning another employee that could, if released, be an invasion of privacy
- records relating to a pending legal claim that would be discoverable in court.

Personnel Records: Benefits

Record Type	Retention Period
Disability records	Permanent
Pension vesting files	Permanent
Retirement benefits	Permanent
Service records	Permanent

Personnel Records – Continued

Record Type

Retention Period

General

Permanent earnings and records

7 years after benefit termination

Attendance records

3 years after termination

Employee contracts

7 years after termination

Employee salary schedules

7 years after termination

Health and Safety

Accident/injury reports

6 years

Employee medical complaints

6 years

Employee medical records

30 years from termination

Employee time cards/sheets

3 years

Environmental test records/reports

6 years

Hazardous exposure records

30 years

Toxic substance exposure reports

30 years

Workers' compensation records

12 years after injury (filing), death or last compensation payment

Personnel Actions

Applications hired/rejected

1 years

Employee evaluations

2 years after termination

Personnel files, terminated

3 years

Termination records

3 years

Salary Administration

W-2 forms

4 years from time of filing

W-4 forms

4 years from date of filing

Time cards

4 years from date of filing

Time sheets

4 years from date of filing

I-9 form

3 years

D. FINANCIAL AND ACCOUNTING RECORDS

Record Type	Retention Period
Banking	
Bank deposits	7 years
Bank statements	7 years
Cancelled checks	7 years
Check registers/stubs	7 years
General	
Audit reports	Permanent
Balance sheets, annual	Permanent
Balance sheets, monthly/quarterly	Destroy after one year
Budgets, approved, revised	Permanent
Financial reports, annual	Permanent
Financial reports, monthly	Destroy after one year
Financial statements	Permanent
Parishioner Contribution Envelope/Statement	2 years
Investment/Insurance	
Bonds, cancelled	4 years from date of cancellation
Certificates of deposit, cancelled	3 years after redemption
Insurance policies/active	Permanent
Insurance policies/cancelled	Permanent
Letters of credit	7 years
Mortgage records	7 years
Securities sales	5 years
Stock investment	5 years after sale
Accounting	
Accounts payable invoices	7 years
Accounts payable ledgers	7 years
Accounts receivable ledgers	7 years
Credit card statements/charge slips	7 years
Invoices & paid bills, major building construction	Permanent
Invoices & paid bills, general accts	7 years
Cash books	7 years
Cash journals	7 years
Cash journal, receipts on offerings and pledges	7 years
Receipts	7 years
Mortgage payments	7 years

Financial Records – Continued

Record type	Retention Period
General ledger/annual	Permanent
Journals, general & specific funds	Permanent
Journal entry sheets	7 years
Ledgers, subsidiary	7 years
Payroll journals	7 years
Payroll registers, summary schedule of earnings, deductions and accrued leave.	7 years
Pension records	Permanent
Pledge registers/ledgers	Permanent

Tax Records

Employment taxes, contributions and payments, including taxes withheld, FICA.	4 years from date of filing
W-2 forms	4 years from date of filing
W-4 forms	4 years from date of filing
Tax exempt certificates, form 990	Permanent

E. PROPERTY RECORDS

Record type	Retention Period
Architectural records, blueprints, building designs, specification	Permanent
Architectural drawings	Permanent
Deeds files	Permanent
Mortgage documents	Permanent
Property appraisals	Permanent
Real estate surveys/plots, plans	Permanent
Title search papers & certificates	Permanent

F. CEMETERY RECORDS

Record type	Retention Period
Account cards (record of lot ownership and payments)*	Permanent
Annual report	Permanent
Bank statements	7 years
Board minutes	Permanent
Burial cards (record of internments name, date of burial, lot number, etc. arranged alphabetically)	Permanent
Burial record (record of internments name, date of burial, etc.)*	Permanent
Contracts documenting lot ownership	Permanent
Correspondence	Selective retention. Keep if item has historical, legal, fiscal value
General ledger	Permanent
Lot maps*	Permanent

G. Publications

Anniversary books	Permanent
Annual reports to the parish	Permanent
Newsletters of the parish or parish-affiliated organizations	Permanent
Other parish-related publications	Permanent
Parish bulletins	Permanent

*Must have duplicate records off site from original records.