

Parish Records Retention Guidelines



This guideline has been created to help congregations to establish a records retention schedule to ensure that records are actively managed and do not become overwhelming to weed through in years to come. As many congregations move towards using less paper and keeping records electronically, these guidelines should also be applied to electronic records.

A **records retention schedule** identifies the types of records created by a congregation/parish and the parish leadership and determines their retention and disposition. This guideline provides a sample records retention schedule that your congregation can use to manage your records. If your congregation or leadership creates records not on this schedule and you are uncertain how long to keep them, contact the Archivist for more information.

All record types with **permanent** retention are considered archival and should be transferred to the Archives when the records are no longer actively used or accessed. It is good practice to send such records to the Diocese of Toronto Archives every three to five years. Only one copy should be deposited to the Archives. Record that do not have a permanent retention should be destroyed at the end of designated retention period. Any sensitive or personnel information should be shredded rather than recycled.

Any documentation relating to an ongoing investigation, court case or audit must not be destroyed, regardless of previously agreed retention schedules.

Record Type: Administrative/Parish operations	Retention Period	Comments
Agendas	7 years	
Annual Vestry Reports	Permanent	
Bylaws, policies, and procedure manuals	Permanent	Retain all historical (superseded) versions
Correspondence and memos: general	3 years	
Correspondence and memos: meaningful (e.g. related to legal issues or important matters)	Permanent	
Legal documents (e.g., deeds, titles, mortgages, bills of sale)	Permanent	
Minutes and reports of congregational boards, committees and organizations	Permanent	Includes such things as ACW, advisory board, and vestry
Minutes of other church groups: e.g., deanery, Diocesan Synod, Provincial Synod, General Synod	While current	Destroy when no longer needed for reference
Vestry (Service) registers	Permanent	Includes information on services, attendance and offerings

Record Type: Membership/Vital Statistics	Retention Period	Comments
Registers: baptism, marriage, burial	Permanent	All completed registers should be sent to the archives.
Parish rolls/membership lists	Permanent	
Directories: members and staff	Permanent	
Mailing lists	While current	Mailing lists should only be used for the purpose that the information has been acquired for, per PIPEDA Principle 5
Record Type: Financial Records	Retention Period	Comments
Audited Financial Statements	Permanent	Annual unaudited financial statements in the absence of an audit
Bank statements, deposit books/slips, and reconciliations	7 Years	
Budget planning documents	Until budget approved	
Charitable donation tax receipt (charity copy)	7 years	The CRA requires copies to be kept for 2 years after the year in which the receipt was issued. We recommend keeping copies for 7 years due to the CRA audit period of 7 years.
Cheque Register and cancelled cheques	7 Years	
General Ledger	Permanent	
Monthly Financial Statement	7 Years	
Offering Envelopes	6 Years	
Invoices: construction	Permanent	
Invoices: other capital	7 years	
Invoices: operating	7 years	
Sub-ledgers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accounts payable • accounts receivable • cash receipts • payroll 	7 years	
Tax Returns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered Charity Information return (T3010) • GST/HST Returns 	7 Years	The same retention applies to any records necessary to verify the tax return

Record Type: Personnel	Retention	Comments
Congregation based Personnel Policies	Permanent	
Payroll Records: T4s	7 Years	The same retention applies to any records necessary to verify the T4
Payroll Records: T4As	7 Years	The same retention applies to any records necessary to verify the T4A
Payroll Records: CPP, EI, deductions	7 Years	
Personnel Records	Permanent	Contact Diocesan Archivist
Screening files	Permanent	
Record Type: Property/Liability	Retention	Comments
Building Inspection reports (also includes fire inspection reports & elevator inspection reports)	Retain until a subsequent inspection report is completed	
Capital construction records, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • survey and title searches • contracts (incl. change orders) • funding approvals • testing reports and certificates • final drawings “as built” 	Permanent	
Contracts and related RFPs (successful): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supplies • service • maintenance 	7 years after completion/termination	
Insurance Policy: Property/Liability	Permanent	
Insurance Policy: other (including boiler and machinery, travel, accident, course of construction)	7 years	
Licenses (use of space, etc.)	Permanent	A copy of the license should also be sent to the archives for the property file.
Plans, Surveys, Drawings, and Specifications	Permanent	
Property deeds/titles	Permanent	Copies should be sent to the Archives
Property Tax bills	7 years	Limited to rectories and other surplus property.
Requests for Proposal: unsuccessful	7 years after RFP submitted	
Utility Contracts	7 years	

Record Type: Other	Retention	Comments
Audio/visual recordings of congregation/activities (if historically important and identified)	Permanent	May include oral histories. Update to a format that is machine readable by current formats to reduce space usage and keep accessible.
Bibles, Prayer Books, hymnals	While in use	Photocopy any unique or relevant notations/information for permanent retention.
Newspaper clippings	Permanent	Must photocopy on acid-free paper, identify newspaper name and date of publication.
Parish Histories/Anniversary booklets	Permanent	An anniversary is a good opportunity to transfer files to the Archives!
Parish Newsletters	Permanent	
Parish Profiles	Permanent	These documents, compiled when the parish is seeking a new incumbent, are an excellent 'snapshot' of a parish
Photographs (image identified and dated)	Selective permanent retention	Keep good quality photographs only, labeled with names and dates.
Scrapbooks (contents clearly identified and dated)	Permanent	
Service bulletins	Selective Permanent retention	Can be a valuable historic resource. Select samples and/or special events if space is limited