



What does the Archives want? : a basic guide for congregations

The United Church of Canada has long recognized the importance of an archives program for preserving the record of the Church's achievements, and for meeting its administrative needs. The records of congregations held at the United Church of Canada Archives constitute an important research collection for both church workers and those studying the Church's history.

By adhering to the regulations detailed in the United Church *Manual* and adopting a common sense approach to records administration and preservation, fulfilling records responsibilities can be relatively easy and rewarding.

Below is a simple guideline of what should and what should not be transferred to the Archives:

What records should be transferred to the Archives?

- ✓ Baptismal, marriage, and burial registers
- ✓ Historic rolls, communion rolls and registers
- ✓ Official minutes and correspondence of church courts and annual congregational meetings
- ✓ Board and committee manuals and organizational charts
- ✓ Official minutes, correspondence and reports of standing, sub-, and ad hoc committees
- ✓ Property records, including plans, deeds, titles, leases, mortgages, bills of sale, construction and maintenance contracts and invoices
- ✓ Records and correspondence of all groups and associations, including:
 - Women's groups (Ladies' Aid Society, Woman's Missionary Society, Woman's Association, and United Church Women)
 - Men's groups (A.O.T.S., Men's Club)
 - Sunday School, youth groups
 - Choirs, Mission bands, Bible classes, etc.
- ✓ Correspondence files
- ✓ Special church bulletins, i.e. anniversaries and dedications. Selected bulletins can be saved over a year to provide an overview of a congregation's activities per decade.
- ✓ Sample of church newsletters
- ✓ Annual reports and audited financial records
- ✓ Clearly identified and dated photographs of personnel, executive, boards, buildings, properties, special events.

What records should stay with your congregation?

- ✗ Duplicate congregational materials, i.e. photocopies of minutes
- ✗ Records created by presbytery, conference or national offices; i.e. photocopies of presbytery or conference minutes
- ✗ Invoices, receipts, or cancelled cheques
- ✗ Conference or national church publications
- ✗ Pulpit or family Bibles unless they contain important historic information not obtainable elsewhere.

What about scrapbooks and photo albums?

- Scrapbooks can hold interesting collections of memorabilia, but it takes careful planning and investment in proper materials to ensure such collections are long-lasting. Many of the materials used in scrapbooking deteriorate over-time. If it is necessary to prepare a scrapbook use acid-free paper and archival adhesive. Otherwise keep the scrapbooks on-site for congregational use.
- Photo albums face the same preservation considerations and archival materials should be used. It is best to select clearly identifiable images to send to the archives. Make sure photographs include names, dates and locations.

For a more detailed records retention schedules, see:

[\[link to retention schedule factsheet\]](#)

A network of United Church Archives exists across the country to preserve the archival records of all courts of the United Church, including the records of congregations.

Congregational records should be routinely transferred to the appropriate Conference Archives for permanent preservation; however, before preparing your records for transfer, you may be wondering: *Why should* these records be sent to the Archives?

The Manual and Archives

Section 090(a) of *The Manual* (2010) clearly identifies the need to archive church records:

- Church records have an historical and legal value that necessitates their being correctly kept and carefully preserved
- Church bodies should use the “utmost diligence to secure the accuracy and the safety of their records
- Church records are the property of the United Church of Canada and ministers, officials, or other individuals may not alienate them or in any way assume personal control over them.

Because church records are the property of the United Church of Canada, all inactive records should be centralized in an archival repository and not scattered among various local archives, libraries, and research centers.

To accommodate the geographical size of the country, each Conference has its own Archive (the Central Ontario Conferences – Bay of Quinte, Toronto, Hamilton, London and Manitou – share the same facility with the General Council Archives) to house the archival records of Conference, presbyteries and pastoral charges.

The advantages of sending your records to your Conference Archives are many:

- Staff are trained and follow professional archival standards to acquire, arrange and describe, preserve and make material available to researchers
- The Archives are secure, environmentally controlled spaces suited to store archival material
- Records are placed in acid-free folders and boxes for further protection
- Outdated records stored in churches are susceptible to fire, water, damage, mould, silverfish, being misplaced or stolen, etc.
- Records are made more accessible to potentially more researchers
- Church records serve as a source of information for church histories and celebrations, community histories and genealogical research
- Records are our memory, not only of facts or evidence of activities and decisions, but also our collective story as a church:

“The Archives belongs not to me, not to the church, not to the School [VST]. It is the corporate memory of our life with God, in all its beauty and tragedy and wonder.”

*Bob Stewart, Past Archivist,
British Columbia Conference*

For more information, contact your
Conference Archives:

<http://www.united-church.ca/contact/archives>