

What Do 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 meeting its administrative needs. The records of congregations held at The United Church of Canada Archives constitute an important research collection for church workers and those studying the church's history. By adhering to the regulations detailed in *The Manual* and adopting a common sense approach to records administration and preservation, fulfilling records responsibilities can be relatively easy and rewarding.

Below are some guidelines for what should and should not be transferred to the Archives.

What records should be transferred to the Archives?

- ✓ Baptismal, marriage, and burial registers
- ✓ Historic rolls and 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, and 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 (AOTS, Men's Club)
 - Sunday schools, 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, and special events

What records should stay with your congregation?

- ✗ Duplicate congregational materials (photocopies of minutes)
- ✗ Records created by Regional Councils, or national office (i.e., photocopies of Regional Council minutes)
- ✗ Invoices, receipts, or cancelled cheques
- ✗ 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 scrapbooks 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, so use archival materials. It is best to choose clearly identifiable images to send to the Archives. Make sure photographs include names, dates, and locations.

For detailed records retention schedules, search "Sample Records Schedule: Congregations" at <https://www.unitedchurcharchives.ca/>

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 Regional Council Archives for permanent preservation. However, before preparing to transfer your records, you may be wondering: *Why should* these records be sent to the Archives?

The Manual and Archives

Section A.5 of *The Manual, 2016*, clearly identifies the need to archive church records:

- Church records “have historical and legal value.”
- Church bodies are responsible for “making sure the records are accurate and complete” and “keeping the records safe, secure and under their control.”
- Church records are the property of The United Church of Canada; “they may not be taken or kept by any member, minister, or other person.”

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

To accommodate the geographical size of the country, each Conference has its own Archives (the Ontario Regional Councils share the same facility with the General Council Archives) to house the archival records of Regional Councils and communities of faith.

The advantages of sending your records to your Regional Council Archives are many

- Staff are trained and follow professional archival standards to acquire, arrange, describe, preserve, and make material available to researchers.
- The Archives are secure, environmentally controlled spaces suited to storing 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 of our collective story as a church.

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

Bob Stewart, Past Archivist, BC Conference

For more information, contact your
Regional Council Archives:
Search “archives directory” at
www.unitedchurcharchives.ca/