

**USING CATHOLIC PARISH RECORDS AND ARCHIVES**  
**Georgia State Archives**  
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**SACRAMENTAL REGISTERS AND RECORDS**

Canon 535 states,

- §1 *Every parish is to have parochial registers, that is, those of baptisms, marriages, deaths, and others as prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop. The pastor is to see that these registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved.*
- §2 *In the baptismal register are also to be noted confirmation and those things which pertain to the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 1133, of adoption, of the reception of sacred orders, of perpetual profession made in a religious institute, and of change of rite. These notations are always to be noted on a baptismal certificate.*
- §3 *Each parish is to have its own seal. Documents regarding the canonical status of the Christian faithful and all acts which can have canonical juridic importance are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and sealed with the parish seal.*
- §4 *In each parish there is to be a storage area, or archive, in which the parochial registers are protected along with letters of bishops and other documents which are to be preserved for reason of necessity or advantage. The pastor is to take care that all of these things, which are to be inspected by the diocesan bishop or his delegate at the time of visitation or at some other opportune time, do not come into the hands of outsiders.*
- §5 *Older parochial records are also to be carefully protected according to the prescripts of particular law.*

*Permanent Records*

Sacramental registers are permanent, historical records. Care should be taken to purchase registers of quality construction and binding. Use of the alphabetized list at the beginning of each register is also strongly encouraged.

*Computerized Files*

Although computerized files may be convenient for indexing needs, these are never to be considered an acceptable substitute for the original handwritten registers.

*Parish Archive*

The original handwritten sacramental registers are to be kept permanently in the parish archive, as are prenuptial forms; they are never to be destroyed.

### *Safe Storage*

Sacramental records are confidential information. Registers should be kept in a secure safe (at least fire-resistant, but fireproof is preferred) in the parish, and should not be removed, copied, or loaned without the approval of the chancellor of the diocese.

### *Unified, Merged, Suppressed Parishes*

If a parish is unified or merged with another parish, or is suppressed, the bishop's decree will include information relative to the disposition of the parish record books and goods.

## **BAPTISM REGISTER**

Canon 877, §1 states,

*The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without any delay record in the baptismal register the names of the baptized, with mention made of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, if any, place and date of the conferral of the baptism and the date and place of birth.*

### *Baptism Certificate*

A signed, dated and sealed certificate of baptism is to be issued as soon as possible after the celebration of the sacrament.

### *Notations Always Included*

A baptism certificate is to include all information of a public nature, but must not include any confidential notations, such as references to adoption or legitimacy. The sections for confirmation and marriage, sometimes on the reverse of the form, are to be completed as the notations in the baptismal record indicate. If there are no notations, it should be completed with the phrase, "None recorded."

### *Source of Information*

It is prudent to use a civil birth certificate or hospital record of birth as supporting documentation to verify the date of birth and parents' names for entry in the baptism register. Entering information in the baptism register based on verbal statements alone can be problematic, and could result in the recording of inaccurate information and the creation of inauthentic records. Use of the maiden surname of adult women who are baptized is appropriate.

### *Godparents:*

Insofar as possible, there should be a godparent for the person to be baptized. In adult baptism, the godparent assists in Christian Initiation. In infant baptism, the godparent, with the parents, presents the child for baptism and helps the baptized to lead the Christian life in harmony with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent to it.

A baptized person belonging to a non-Catholic ecclesial community may be admitted as a Christian witness to baptism but only along with a Catholic godparent (*cf* c. 874, §2). However, for just cause, a member of an Eastern non-Catholic (Orthodox) church may be admitted as a godparent along with a Catholic godparent (*cf* CCEO 685, §3; 1967 *Ecumenical Directory* [481]). The name of a non-Catholic

godparent or Christian witness is to be recorded together with the name of the Catholic godparent in the baptismal register (*cf c. 877, §1*), and noted on the baptism certificate.

Canon law allows for one godparent, male or female, or two godparents, one male and one female; the law does not permit more than two godparents, nor does it permit two godparents of the same gender (*cf canons 872, 873, 874, 893*).

When a godparent is represented by a duly appointed proxy at a baptism, the name of the proxy representative is entered in parentheses after the name of the godparent in the baptism record, with "proxy" clearly noted. Appointment of a proxy is made in writing, or in front of two witnesses, by *the godparent* of the one to be baptized.

For cases in which the parents of the baptized request new godparents some time after the baptism has taken place, it should be explained that the parents may choose anyone to assist with the faith development of their child, but that does not alter who witnessed the baptism; therefore, the register cannot be changed.

### **Single Parents**

The name of the mother is to be entered in the register if there is public proof of her maternity (*e.g.*, the birth certificate), or if she states this in writing or before two witnesses (canon 877). The name of the father is to be inserted only if there is public proof (*e.g.*, the birth certificate), or by his own sworn declaration before the pastor and two witnesses. If no public proof is available, the name of the father or the mother is not recorded and the phrase "father unknown" or "mother unknown" is to be placed in the record. In these cases, supporting documentation is to be kept in the permanent files of the parish archives and include appropriate cross-references.

### **Emergency Baptism**

*Emergencies:* When baptism occurs in an emergency situation, either at home or in an institution such as a hospital, the fact of the baptism is to be recorded in the register of the *parish in which the baptism took place* (canon 877), and notification is to be sent to the parish of the parents of the baptized (in cases of infant baptism) or the parish in which the individual resides (in cases of adult baptism), where the register is to be completed as outlined for ordinary baptism with a clear notation of the territorial parish in which the sacrament was conferred. In cases when rites are supplied at the proper parish in the future, the date of baptism to be listed in the register is the date the "emergency baptism" took place. The words "rites supplied" and the date of the completion of the celebration are to be listed in the notations column.

*Adoption:* Canon law requires that notations relative to adoption are to be included in a person's baptismal record (*cf canons 535, 877, §3*). On October 20, 2000, the then National Conference of Catholic Bishops issued the following Complementary Norms for the United States in accord with the prescriptions of canon 877, §3 relative to recording the baptism of adopted children:

- For a child baptized after adoption, the information to be entered into

the baptismal register includes:

1. The child's Christian name as designated by the adoptive parents;
2. The names of the adoptive parents;
3. The date and place of birth of the child;
4. The names of the godparents selected by the adoptive parents;
5. The place and date of the baptism;
6. The name of the minister of baptism;
7. The fact of adoption but not the names of the birth parents.

**NO MENTION OF THE FACT OF ADOPTION IS TO BE MADE ON A BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATE ISSUED BY THE PARISH.**

***Parish personnel having access to parish registers have an obligation not to disclose to any person any information which would identify or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that a person was adopted.***

**Notations Always Included on Baptism Certificate:**

In addition to baptism, the following are to be recorded in one's baptismal record or the record of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church if applicable, and mention of these notations always is to be included on a certificate of baptism issued by the parish:

■ **Confirmation:** When confirmation is conferred at a church other than the baptismal church, and notice of the reception of confirmation is received at the baptismal parish, a notation including the church name, place, and date of confirmation is to be made in the baptismal record of the person confirmed (*cf* canon 895), or the record of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church if applicable.

■ **First Communion:** When notice of the reception of first communion is received at the baptismal parish, the date and place of reception of the sacrament may be noted in the parish first communion register.

■ **Holy Orders:** Upon receiving notice from the local ordinary or competent major superior, the pastor of the place of baptism is to record the celebration of a man's ordination to the priesthood or diaconate in his baptismal record (*cf* canon 1054) or in his record of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church if applicable.

■ **Marriage:** Upon receiving notice from the pastor of the place of the celebration of marriage, the pastors of the places of baptism of the spouses are to record the fact in the baptismal records of the spouses (*cf* canon 1122) or the records of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church if applicable.

• **Declaration of Invalidity or Dissolution of Marriage:** Upon receipt of official notification that a marriage is declared invalid (annulment), or is legitimately dissolved, except for death, the pastors of the places of baptism of the parties are to record the notation in the baptismal records (*cf* canon 1123) or the records of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church if applicable.

- *Perpetual Profession:* Canon 535 requires that a notation be made in the baptismal record, or the record of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church if applicable, of a person who makes perpetual profession (final vows) in a religious institute or religious order.
- *Change of Rite:* Canon 535 requires that a notation be made in the baptismal record, or the record of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church if applicable, of a person who changes rite, e.g., from Latin Catholic to Melkite Catholic.
- *Formal Defection from the Catholic Church:* Upon receiving official notification of a person's formal act of defection from the Catholic Church (leaving the Catholic Church), the pastor of the place baptism is to record the notation in the baptismal record (cf canon 535, §2, and PCLT Notification Prot. No. 10279/2006, March 13, 2006) or in the record of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, if applicable.
- *Reception into Full Communion:* An individual's profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church is to be recorded either in the reception into full communion register (cf RCIA, 486) if one is in use by the parish, or in the baptism register of the parish, noting the date of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, the date of birth, the date, place and minister of baptism, the parents' names, and other information for the record as available. When confirmation and first communion are received, notation of confirmation is to be made in the person's record of profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, and the name of the person making the profession of faith is to be recorded also in the confirmation register and the first communion register of the parish, along with the facts relative to the person's date and place of baptism, the date and place of the person's profession of faith and reception into full communion with the Catholic Church, and other information as needed for the record.

#### **DIOCESAN ARCHIVES:**

The Office of the Archives collects, preserves, and makes available for research diocesan records, documents, artifacts, and other works of enduring value concerning the work and history of the Catholic Church within the geographical area covered by the diocese. Official diocesan records are defined as all recorded information, regardless of media type or characteristics, made or received and maintained by an agency, institution, or office pursuant to the legal obligations or in the transaction of diocesan activities.

Agencies and institutions are considered those administrative units which perform specific functions and maintain an operational relationship to the bishop. Offices are the administrative units designed to assist the bishop in the administration of the diocese and maintains a reportorial relationship with the bishop. Such agencies and institutions may be operated by religious orders of men and/or women, laymen and/or women, parishes, and schools but remain under the rubric of the diocese.

## ROMAN CURIA:

- Historical archives of the oldest institutions of the Apostolic See, such as the Apostolic Chancery and the Apostolic Chamber, or abolished dicasteries, such as some including the Roman Congregations founded by Sixtus V, the Apostolic Dataria, the Congregation of the Consistory.
- Historical archives of the current Bodies of the Roman Curia. For example, the Secretariat of State, Congregations, Law Courts, Offices, Papal Councils and Papal Commissions.

### **Papal diplomatic**

- Historical archives of over 75 diplomatic representations of the Holy See – papal nunciatures and delegations - from all over the world and dating from the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Papal representations are required to send their own archives periodically to the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano.

### **Families and individuals**

- Archives of aristocratic families having historical and traditional connections with the papal state that have been sent, donated or sold to the Archivio Apostolico Vaticano as from the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to ease periods of financial hardship or to guarantee the safety of their documents in periods of political and social instability. For example: *Arch. Boncompagni-Ludovisi*, *Arch. Borghese*, *Arch. Della Valle-Del Bufalo*, *Arch. Patrizi-Montoro*, *Arch. Ruspoli-Marescotti*, *Arch. Rospigliosi*.
- Archives produced by one or more members of the same family in relation to posts held in the Papal Curia (*Fondo Albani*, *Fondo Carpegna*, *Fondo Pio*, etc.).
- Documents related to individuals that came to the Vatican for various reasons (*Fondo Benigni*, *Carte Piastrelli*).

Though the archive has developed policies that restrict access to material by pontificate, with access granted no earlier than 75 years after the close of a pope's reign, popes have granted exceptions. For example, Pope Paul VI made the records of the Second Vatican Council available not long after it ended. In 2002, Pope John Paul II allowed scholars access to documents from the historical archives of the Secretariat of State (Second Section) pertaining to the Holy See's relations with Germany during the pontificate of Pope Pius XI (1922–1939) in order "to put an end to unjust and thoughtless speculation" about the Church's relationship with the Nazi Party.

There are other Holy See archives in Rome, since each department of the Roman Curia has its own archives. The word "secret" in its modern sense can be applied to some of the material kept by the Apostolic Penitentiary, when it concerns matters of the internal forum; but registers of the rescripts that it issued up to 1564 have been deposited in the Vatican Apostolic Archives and are open for consultation by qualified scholars. Half of these have already been put in digital form for easier consultation. The confidentiality of the material means that, in spite of the centuries that have passed since 1564, special rules apply to its publication.