



Anglican Church of Canada

80 Hayden Street, Toronto, ON M4Y 3G2

January 26, 2009

To: House of Bishops
From: Anglican Diocesan Archivists
Subject: Parish Register Records

Anglican Diocesan Archivists from across Canada recently met and raised concerns about the disposition, security and integrity of parish registers and record holdings of dissenting parishes in the Anglican Church of Canada.

Background

- Parish records are created for the purpose of recording the baptism, confirmation, marriage and burial of the faithful as well as documenting worship, ministry, stewardship and decision-making of the Christian community;
- The creation, maintenance and archiving of such records is one of the ways in which we come to take our place in the ongoing life of the Body of Christ down through the centuries;
- The unique and irreplaceable information contained within these parish records continues to be at risk of being lost or destroyed and, in the case of dissenting parishes leaving their respective dioceses, of being alienated.

Response

- Dioceses, in whose name parish property is held, hold parish registers and records in trust for members of the Anglican Church of Canada and, in so doing, are responsible for maintaining and preserving the security and integrity of the records;
- Personal information must be protected and accessed according to provincial legislation and diocesan privacy policies;
- Parish records and registers must be considered assets of the diocese from the outset if negotiations are to be undertaken for change in ownership;
- Inactive parish registers and records in their original form should be transferred to the Diocesan Archives for safe-keeping;
- For legal purposes, alternate forms of the record (i.e. microfilm, digital copies, etc.) must be verified and monitored closely to ensure only authorized individuals can provide certified copies.

Advantages/Disadvantages

Advantages: Will ensure that dioceses live up to their legal commitment to preserve and maintain the security and integrity of key parish records;
Will locate records in archives of the diocese whose parishes originally created the records;
Will ensure personal information is protected and used appropriately.

Disadvantages: Will possibly lead to resistance among dissenting parishes in turning over parish registers and records to the diocese.

Recommendation

It is therefore recommended that:

Every diocese enacts policies and procedures that ensure inactive parish registers and records are transferred to the diocesan archives on a regular basis;

Every diocese take steps to ensure that parish registers and records are declared part of its assets should court proceedings develop and negotiations unfold;

The diocesan archivist be consulted to identify record gaps and to obtain sign off for the transfer of any outstanding records.