



Archives of the Diocese of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island

PROVIDING INFORMATION TO THE PUBLIC FROM YOUR PARISH REGISTERS:

A GUIDELINE FOR THE PARISHES

The purpose of this booklet is to familiarize parish clergy and personnel with the Diocesan Archives Policies and procedures regarding public access to parish records and to outline what we currently consider best practice to minimize, or eliminate, the risks that have been identified involving the process of providing personal information from the contents of parish records.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES:

Genealogy Requests are no longer considered Routine Parish Business because of increasing risks to privacy and potential damage to church records. (SEE parts 2 and 3 below)

Routine Parish Business and Genealogy Requests require different responses and procedures, and different restrictions apply to each.

Members of the public are never allowed to touch or search parish registers.

ROUTINE PARISH BUSINESS:

Issuing certificates of Baptism, Confirmation and Marriage; and finding Burial records.



Diocesan Guideline 2.2.4: Anglican Church Records allows the parishes to charge a fee for the issuing of a certified document. Most parishes at this time are charging \$15 to \$25 for this service. The fee is not compulsory; the parish may use its own discretion as to whether the person who is legitimately in need of a certificate can afford the fee.



1. **BASIC RESPONSES TO REQUESTS:**

You may forward any requests, whether from parishioners or the general public, to the **Archivist**. The Archivist will search and send a scanned copy from your register by email attachment – either to you, or to the requestor, if appropriate.

Genealogy requests do not normally require a certified document; only a digital scan or photocopy.

A -- If your parish records are in the Diocesan Archives:

- a. **Routine Parish Business:** For a request for a certified copy of a baptism or marriage record (or any type of record) **that is less than 100 years old** the **Archivist** will search for the record, scan it, and will send it back to the Rector or AUTHORIZED CLERGY of the parish as a PDF attachment by email, usually the same day. They can then verify the requestor's ID and entitlement to the information before issuing a certified document.
- b. For a request for a certified copy of a baptism or marriage record (or any type of record) **that is more than 100 years old** request can be directed to the **Archivist** who can search for the record, scan it, and will send it directly to the requester.

A CERTIFICATE IS A LEGAL DOCUMENT and all information from the register is transcribed verbatim from the original record and stamped with the Parish Stamp, or a photocopy can be stamped and signed by the current Rector or authorized clergy for that parish. (The name of the original clergy who signed the record should be transcribed to the new certificate in the appropriate place on the form.)



B -- If you have your parish records in the parish:

As routine parish business arises, parish clergy or authorized staff will search your registers and give the information directly to the person asking. If the record is **less than 100 years old** you must first verify that they are entitled to the information.

INDIVIDUAL'S ENTITLEMENT:

- c. **Routine Parish Business:** For a certified copy of a baptism or marriage record, first be sure that the requesting person is entitled to the record, (is named in the record or has next-of-kin permission to obtain it). If you don't know the person, or their family, ask for identification and save a copy of their ID for your files, especially if they are communicating by email or telephone.

NOTE: By now the public in general are aware of protection of privacy issues and will understand the necessity of the above procedures.

C – A Note on Bill C3 Requests

- A. Given the large influx of requests for certified baptism certificates, please note that Immigration can accept an uncertified record with a citation showing its location in the archive and a transcript of the email correspondence with the archivist (given the archivist's consent and consent of any other party's involved) If there are any issues with certification or the number of requests for certification is beyond the parish's capacity, please refer requesters to this policy.

2. GENEALOGY

We no longer do genealogy USING PARISH RECORDS DIRECTLY, we refer the general public and genealogists to other sources, in order to protect the registers from damage, and also to protect the privacy of those who are recorded in them.

For general enquiries for the purpose of family history research, forward the request to the Archivist. The Archivist will not expose your registers to public use under any circumstances. The Archivist will inform the person of other resources, such as the microfilm held at the Nova Scotia Archives (NSA), PAPEI or the Beaton Institute, and of the restrictions that apply, and help them narrow their search.

Do not allow under ANY CIRCUMSTANCES a visitor, known or unknown to the parish, to use the actual parish records for their own personal research. Refer the requestor to the microfilm at the Nova Scotia Archives, PAPEI, or Beaton Institute, or to the Diocesan Archivist, who will do the same and provide additional help.

PUBLIC GENEALOGY RESOURCES: **MICROFILM of our PARISH RECORDS**

NOTE: All microfilm of our Nova Scotia parishes' records is held at the **Nova Scotia Archives (NSA)**, and copies of microfilm for the Cape Breton Region are held at the **Beaton Institute**. Microfilm of our PEI parishes' records is held at the **Public Archives of Prince Edward Island (PAPEI)**. Because these are government and subsidized institutions, they are obliged to make the microfilm accessible for public research, but only under controlled and restricted access conditions and governed by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of each Province (FOIPOP).

These institutions have been acting in complete compliance with our Diocesan Archives Policies and Diocesan Guideline 2.2.4 – ANGLICAN CHURCH RECORDS, since 2005 on a daily basis by NOT allowing photocopies from the microfilm and by NOT allowing access to church registers containing **personal identifying information that is less than 100 years old.**

In addition, they do not allow other organizations to purchase copies of microfilm without permission from the Diocesan Bishop in accordance with Diocesan Guideline 2.2.5 -- DISTRIBUTION OF MICROFILM, which allows only one institution per county to have a copy of the microfilm of church records for their local region, and only after the institution agrees in writing to follow the policies and procedures of this diocese with regards to access to the contents of records that are less than 100 years old.

3. RISKS IDENTIFIED:

1. **Identity theft:** Parish records of baptisms and marriages contain personal and identifying information that can be used to falsify a birth certificate in this province or to produce other forms of legal identification.
2. **Sale of information:**
 - a. Because genealogical organizations can make money from the sale of private and personal identifying information, and have been proven to have that as their chief motivation to obtain mass copies of church records, we do not allow reproduction or distribution of our manuscript (original) records, or of our databases containing family name indexes, to any outside organization or individual.
 - b. Publication of any church record in a book written by an individual or group is not allowed without appropriate permissions granted in writing, for the same reasons.
3. **Protection of Privacy Breach:**
 - a. Our parish registers of baptisms, confirmations, and marriages are a chronicle of an individual parishioner's spiritual life; they were not created for the purpose of genealogy. Even records older than 100 years can contain information that a family would prefer to keep private, so discretion is advised in these instances.
 - b. For legitimate requests for certified copies, **only the person named in the record** is entitled to a copy of their own record, otherwise discretion can be applied.
 - c. A person requesting a record for a disabled family member can do so with written permission from the family member or corroborating next-of-kin.
 - d. **Burial records:** We do not expect (we have no reports of) any misuse of burial records, although in this day and age, anything is possible. The most common request is for the purpose of restoring a grave/cemetery or for locating a family member's plot and visiting it. Burial records may be used in genealogical research, (only records up to 1945 are allowed access at the NSA, The PAPEI and the Beaton Institute in Sydney, Cape Breton), as well as medical and historical research, without harm to the living, that we know of. However, before providing a photocopy of a page of burial records from the register, parish personnel should satisfy themselves as to the requestor's intention, preferably that it will be used for legitimate church purposes, or for broader cultural purposes beneficial to the community.
4. **Legal conflict:** We do not provide copies of a personal parish record, or any information regarding the same, **to a lawyer or solicitor** asking on behalf of a client (without a court order). Upon receiving such a request, we simply inform the lawyer that the client must request it from us personally and directly. (Letters of permission to the lawyer are not accepted in this case.)

5. **Physical damage:** Genealogical research requires extensive handling and exposure of the parish registers which can result in physical damage to the book and even permanent loss of information. The manuscript register itself is of permanent (archival) value; it is the only authentic source and must be preserved. Even for routine enquiries, to minimize exposure over time, only the parish Rector, clergy in charge, or an individual authorized by them, should be allowed to access and handle the registers for routine parish business.

4. BACKGROUND AND SUPPORT:

- a. For a more detailed explanation of our policies, please see **The Diocesan Archives Policies, Revision 5.4, 2008**, posted on the Diocesan website under “Resources – Archives” (or request a copy from the Archivist.)
- b. **Also see the Diocesan Administrative Policies:**
2.2.4 -- ANGLICAN CHURCH RECORDS and 2.2.5-- DISTRIBUTION OF MICROFILM on the Diocesan Website under “DOCUMENTS > POLICIES AND PROCEDURES...”
- c. **At any time, upon request, the Archivist will send to you** any or all of the following:
 - i. A detailed descriptive list of your parish records that are held at the Diocesan Archives
 - ii. A description of the MICROFILM of your parish’s records from the NSA
 - iii. Other guidelines that are available on how to do parish records inventory, how to keep track of material heritage, what records are of permanent value to save for the Archives, and more. On the Diocesan Website:
<https://dq5pwpg1q8ru0.cloudfront.net/2020/10/30/18/48/08/11d175f7-e55a-4035-90ad-e0eddd57f5e9/Keeping%20Track.pdf>

[Parish Records of Permanent Value - what to Save and Archive or destroy](#)
[Inventory Method Details](#)
[What a Heritage Committee can do](#)
[Archives Policy Statement Revision 5.4 2008](#)
[Archives General Information Brochure](#) - April 2016 Revision
[Parish Records -- Guide to Storage and Handling](#)
[Keeping Track – How to Care for your Church Assets and Material Heritage](#)

About the Diocesan Archives:

When a parish deposits their parish records to the Diocesan Archives, the records remain the legal property of the parish corporation and may be accessed by the parish's clergy or officials at any time.

- Whoever delivers the records is given a receipt describing the general contents of the deposit, which also serves as an "Accession Record" until such time as they can be fully processed. A more detailed catalogue list is later sent to the parish for future reference.
- Parish records are cleaned, if necessary, and arranged inside our secure climate-controlled vault. Only the Archivist (or the Executive Director in the absence of the Archivist) can access the Archives Vault.
- The Archivist then describes each item in a catalogue database (NOT accessible to anyone but the Archivist) and gives it a permanent location number on the shelf so it cannot be misplaced.

From this database, a list of holdings can be generated for each parish to use as a reference in keeping track of the location of their parish records.

QUESTIONS? ...ASK THE ARCHIVIST:

The Archivist, Mark Picco, can be reached at the Diocesan Synod Office at (902) 406-8982 or by email at: archives@nspeidiocese.ca



Diocesan Archives Committee

