Best Practices for Sacramental Record Keeping

RCAB Archive Department

I. Entering Records
Each parish must keep a separate register for each sacrament: baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and deaths. First communion and sick calls are optional, but advisable.

Records should be entered into the appropriate register, in chronological order, as soon as possible following the celebration of a sacrament.

Records should be in print (not cursive), in either blue or black ink waterproof ink, and as neatly as possible.

Please enter as much information as can be obtained, try not to leave any fields blank.

For baptisms, please place a small “M” or “F” in parentheses in the bottom-right corner of the “Name” field to clarify the sex of each child.

II. Issuing Certificates

Baptisms
There is a short form and a long form for baptismal certificates.

Short Form

Since there can be sensitive information in baptismal records (birth parents, adoption information, etc.), the short form omits fields such as parent and sponsor names, and is therefore the only form which can be provided directly to an individual who requests it.

The short form should be used for the following:

- For an individual requesting a copy of his/her own record to keep for themselves.
- Government identification needs:
  - ex. To add/amend name on a birth certificate, prove a marriage for social security benefits, renew driver’s license or passport, etc.
- Dual-citizenship applications.

Long Form

The long form certificate should only be used for official Church purposes. These should never be issued directly to an individual, but should be mailed to the pastor or administrator at the parish where it is required.

The long form should be used for the following:

- Individuals preparing to receive the sacraments of first communion, confirmation, marriage, or holy orders.
- Documentation for an annulment (sent directly to a parish or tribunal).

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Post-adoption Baptism

If a child was baptized after an adoption, then all details transcribed onto a certificate should refer to the adopted name of the child, names of the adoptive parents, the sponsors the adoptive parents have chosen, etc. No information regarding the adoption should be transcribed on the certificate.

Children Baptized Prior to Adoption

The following notations should only be made after the adoption has been finalized:

- List both birth and adoptive parents, place parentheses around birth parents’ names.
- Child’s birth name shall be placed in parentheses with the adopted name added.
- Make notation that the child was legally adopted.

First Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage Certificates

Other sacramental certificates may be sent directly to individuals on the basis that they would have been old enough to recall details related to the event. Regardless, please do not include any potentially sensitive information when issuing these certificates.

III. Entering Updates

The parish of baptism should be notified of any other sacraments an individual has received as soon as possible following the celebration of that sacrament. Updates should be entered into the notations section at the end of the record. The only exception is some instances where there is a separate field for confirmation information.

The note should include the sacrament, date, officiant, parish and city. In the case of a marriage, please also include the spouse’s name.

Annullments may also be added to the notations section.

Once an update has been entered and, if there is one, the notice of entry returned to the notifying parish, please securely discard the notification.

IV. Corrections to Records

In the event of a minor error, such as a spelling mistake, please draw a single line through the incorrect information and write the correct information above or below as space allows.

Under any circumstances, do not attempt to erase information; do not use correction liquid, correction tape, ink, etc.

For any major changes – a legal name change, requests to change godparents, etc. Please email the archivist at tlester@rcab.org.