

*DIOCESE OF CHARLOTTE*

*SACRAMENTAL REGISTERS PROCEDURES AND GUIDELINES*

*Who the people of the Diocese of Charlotte are as North Carolinians and who we are as children of God shapes our identity. As time passes, our identity develops and matures. History captures our past, defines our present and shades our future.*

*One of the most important sources for understanding our historical identity is our parochial sacramental registers: Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage and Death. These books provide invaluable records of the people who make up a parish and, collectively, the Diocese. They retain vital information of interest to the Church, individuals and communities. The value of sacramental registers is acknowledged in civil and Canon law.*

*Directed to the creation, preservation and use of sacramental registers, the following procedures are based partly on the provisions of Canon law (C.), Diocesan policies (GPA), and on questions and resulting discussions.<sup>1</sup> These procedures provide practical norms for parish use.*

<sup>1</sup>*John J. Treanor created this policy for the Archdiocese of Chicago. Cynthia Barnes made revisions, changes and additions for the Diocese of Charlotte. Mr. Treanor granted permission to copy and use any portions of the original.*

**Diocese of Charlotte**  
**Sacramental Record Policies and Recommendations**

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## Sacramental Record Policies and Recommendations

### I. OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY

**1.1 Copyright:** Ownership and copyrights of all Roman Catholic Sacramental Records reside within the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Charlotte.

**1.2 Responsibility:** The creation, preservation and use of sacramental records are the responsibility of the person in charge, whether pastor, chaplain or administrator (C. 535/1). All legal matters must be reviewed by the Diocesan Attorney through the Chancellor (GPA 17.1).

### II. PROCEDURES FOR THE CREATION OF SACRAMENTAL REGISTERS AND THEIR ANNOTATIONS

**2.1 Sacramental Registers:** Each parish is required to keep the following sacramental registers: Baptism, First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage and Death (C. 535/1, 895; Guidelines for Pastoral Admin (GPA) 14.1). The registers shall be clearly labeled as to the name of parish, city, starting and ending dates. The names in the register shall be indexed. Although computer storage may supplement the registers for reference or statistical purposes, they are not an acceptable replacement for the registers themselves.

The blank, unnumbered or 101<sup>st</sup> pages at the end of books or last pages of each section should not be used for regular entries. These pages are for corrections, additions and reference notations. Do not tape, glue or staple extra items in the register. Enter the correction, additions or reference notations into the spare pages at the end of each section or register. Store extra items or loose sheets in a separate file if necessary.

Retire the books as they become fragile and worn. Some registers are seventy years old and still being used. Consider books with fifty pages rather than one hundred pages if the parish is small. Consider closing combined registers when three or four sections are full.

**2.2 Safe, Secure Storage:** Sacramental Registers should be kept in a secure place. They should be stored and handled in an environment that ensures their preservation (C. 535/4 & 5; GPA 14.1). A fire-proof, locked file cabinet is sufficient to prevent unauthorized access and damage to the sacramental records. Registers should be kept in a low-humidity (less than 50% is best) and low-moisture environment. Steps should be taken to avoid high temperature (below 65 degrees is best), dampness and direct light.

**2.3 Permanent Bindings, Paper, and Ink:** The registers are permanent historical records. The binding and paper quality should be permanent, durable and acid-free (non-yellowing). Leather bound is best. The sacramental registers should be bound with stitched-binding not simple glue binding.

It is best to use permanent black ink (GPA 14.1). The best types of inks are those made for art work or India inks, but they can be expensive and hard to find. Do not use colored inks such as purple, green, pink, turquoise, etc. Colors fade and bleed over time. Beware of water soluble or erasable inks. Pencils, felt-tip and roller-ball pens should never be used. These pen and inks spread and bleed making both sides of the paper difficult to read.

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**2.4 Accuracy and Legibility:** The registers are kept for future reference as legal proof (canonical and civil) of church events, age or nationality status. It is necessary that the entries be made promptly, accurately and legibly. Entries should be printed neatly and legibly so they can be read without difficulty (C. 535.1; GPA 14.1). An inaccurate or illegible record is a great disservice to the persons involved and to their families.

**2.5 Corrections, Additions, and Deletions:** One of the tests for the validity of a record as legal proof is whether it has been officially kept and whether there have been any alterations. Any corrections or deletions that need to be made of factual errors in one or more registers should be made by adding a notation. The notation should be made based on some written proof of error (this proof should be identified in the notation) and do not erase or cross out what someone claims is incorrect information. If the error is technical or incidental (e.g. spelling, date out of sequence, etc.) and the individual who is in charge of the records concurs, then change may be made without notation or proof.

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### III. BAPTISMAL REGISTERS

**3.1 Baptismal Records, in General:** The baptismal register shall record, carefully and without delay, the following information for each baptism: the names of those baptized, their date and place of birth, their date and place of baptism, parents including mother's maiden name, sponsor(s)/ godparent(s) and the minister of the sacrament (C. 877/1). Besides these requirements of the Code of Canon Law, the specific religion of the baptized person's parents must be noted (GPA 1.6).

**3.2 Baptismal Records, Routine Notations:** The baptismal register serves as the master record for a person's membership in the Church (C. 535/2). Notations concerning other sacraments received later in life are to be entered there: Confirmation, Marriage(s) including convalidations, reception of Holy Orders, perpetual profession in religious institute and change of rite. Notations of annulment and prohibitions on future marriages, laicization and dispensation from vows shall also be entered when requested officially by the appropriate authorities.

**3.3 Baptismal Records, Professions of Faith:** The names of persons who are baptized Christians and who enter into full communion with the Catholic Church by means of a profession of faith shall be recorded in the parish baptismal register under the date of profession together with the date and place of baptism of the party; along with the other requirements listed in *Section 3.1: Baptism Records, In General*. Once the elect receive the sacrament of initiation, their name shall be recorded in the baptismal register as outlined above in *Section 3.1: Baptism Records, In General*, and notations shall be recorded in the confirmation and communion registers.

**3.4 Baptismal Records, Illegitimacy:** If a child is born of an unmarried mother, the name of the mother is to be inserted in the baptismal register if there is public proof of her maternity (e.g., a civil birth record) or if she asks this willingly, either in writing or before two witnesses. Likewise, the name of the father shall be inserted in the register if his paternity has been proved either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses. If these conditions are not met, then the child is to be recorded as being of "unknown mother" or unknown father," in Latin "mater ignota" or pater ignotus" (C. 877/2). It is not permitted to make an annotation which says "illegitimate."

### **3.5 Baptismal Records, Adoption – Complementary Legislation Concerning Canon 877/3 (EFFECTIVE 1 December 2000):**

- i) CHILDREN BAPTIZED AFTER THEIR ADOPTION IS FINALIZED: The following information shall be entered in the register:
- ❖ The Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s)
  - ❖ The name(s) of the adoptive parent(s)
  - ❖ The date and place of birth
  - ❖ The names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parent(s)
  - ❖ The place and date of baptism
  - ❖ The name of the minister performing the baptism
  - ❖ The fact of adoption but not the names of the natural parent(s)

DO NOT enter the names of the natural parent(s) in the baptismal register. Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these children will be no different from other baptismal certificates. DO NOT mention the fact of adoption on the baptismal certificate.

- ii) CHILDREN BAPTIZED BEFORE THEIR ADOPTION IS FINALIZED: The following notations shall be added to the baptismal register, but only after the adoption has been finalized with due regard for the civil law of the jurisdiction:
- ❖ Parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parent(s)
  - ❖ The name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added
  - ❖ The child's former surname shall also be parenthesized and the new surname added
  - ❖ A notation shall be made that the child was legally adopted

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### III. BAPTISMAL REGISTERS

#### 3.5 **Baptismal Records, Adoption – Complementary Legislation Concerning Canon 877/3 (EFFECTIVE 1 December 2000):**

iii) BAPTISMAL CERTIFICATES ISSUED BY THE PARISH FOR THESE INDIVIDUALS SHALL GIVE ONLY:

- ❖ The name(s) of the adoptive parent(s)
- ❖ The child's new legal surname
- ❖ The date and place of baptism
- ❖ The name of the minister who conferred the sacrament

DO NOT give the name(s) of the sponsor(s) on the baptismal certificate. DO NOT mention the fact of adoption on the baptismal certificate.

For future ease in reference and to afford what may often be the only possibility of reference after the adoption has been finalized, a baptismal entry for the adopted child can be made in the baptismal register of the adoptive parent(s)' parish, citing the date and location of the original baptismal record listing only the name of the adoptive parent(s), the date and place of birth

**NOTE:** *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.*

**3.6 Baptismal Record, Supporting Documents:** Certain notations in the Baptismal register are accompanied by legal documents which serve as evidence and should also be preserved. Examples would be adoption documents proving paternity, affidavits concerning previously omitted baptisms, and notarized court and/or governmental documents concerning name and/or date changes. These items shall never be glued, stapled, paper clipped or stored in the actual register. After the appropriate notations are made, these items shall be kept in a separate file corresponding to each register and page number. The file shall be referred to in the notation. The file shall be kept permanently.

**3.7 Baptismal Records, Outside Clergy or People:** When a priest or deacon baptizes in a parish church to which he is not assigned, he is responsible for the filing of the necessary records. The baptism shall be recorded in the parish where the baptism took place. If the family is registered in a parish other than the one in which the baptism took place, the baptism is to be recorded in the church where the sacrament was celebrated. However, a notice shall also be sent to the family's own parish requesting that the name of the person baptized be entered into the baptismal register there with an indication of where the actual baptismal record can be found.

**3.8 Baptismal Records, Emergencies:** If a Baptism is performed in a hospital because of an emergency, the necessary information is to be forwarded to the proper parish church of domicile by the hospital pastoral staff within twenty-four hours (GPA 1.7).

**3.9 Baptism, Special Circumstances:** When sacraments are administered in places other than a parish church building, in accordance with diocesan norms, it is important that the records not be "lost" in an unexpected place and be retrievable for future reference. Baptism shall be recorded at the parish whose territory encompasses the location at which the sacrament was celebrated, **unless the place of baptism is a Catholic institution which has received permission from the Chancery to maintain its own sacramental records.** A notice shall also be sent to the parish in which the family is registered (if other than the territorial parish of the place of baptism) requesting the name of the person baptized by entered into the baptismal register there with an indication of where the actual baptismal record may be found.

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#### 3.10 Churches with Valid Baptism (C. 869):

African Methodist Episcopal	Congregational Church	Old Catholics
Amish	Disciples of Christ	Old Roman Catholics
Anglican	Eastern non-Catholic Churches	Orthodox Churches
Assembly of God	Episcopalians	Polish National Church
Baptists	Evangelical Churches	Presbyterian Church
Church of the Brethren	Evangelical United Brethren	Reformed Churches
Church of God	Liberal Catholic Church	Roman Catholic Church
Church of the Nazarene	Lutherans	Seventh Day Adventists
	Methodists	United Church of Christ

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### IV. COMMUNION REGISTERS

**4.1 First Communion Records, in General:** They shall include the date of reception of First Holy Eucharist, name of Celebrant, place and date of baptism, name of the First Communicants and their parents as found on their baptismal certificates.

### V. CONFIRMATION REGISTERS

**5.1 Confirmation Records, in General:** They shall include the date of reception of Confirmation, name of celebrant, Confirmand's name and Confirmation name, date of baptism, father's full name, mother's first and maiden name and sponsors. A notice must also be sent to the church of baptism indicating the name of the recipient, date and place of Confirmation, and name of conferring Bishop/Dean/Pastor so that a notation may be made in the baptismal register (C. 895, DOC Youth Ministry Handbook C-27-28).

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### VI. MARRIAGE REGISTERS

**6.1 Marriage Records, in General:** All marriages (including marriages convalidated in the external forum) are to be entered in the marriage register. The following items are to be noted: the names of the spouses, the person who assisted and the witnesses, the place and date of the marriage celebration, and any pertinent notation (e.g. date and place of baptism) (C.1121). It is also necessary to retain the pre-nuptial file permanently in the parish archives.

**6.2 Marriage Records, Notations:** The following notations are to be entered in the marriage record:

- ❖ The dispensation received from impediments
- ❖ The delegation given to assist at marriage
- ❖ A decree of dissolution or nullity, as well as any restrictions on future marriages

Whenever a rescript is involved, the name of the diocese, congregation, tribunal, etc., which issues the rescript shall be noted, together with the date and the protocol number if one is provided. For dispensations from canonical form, cf., see *Section 6.4 Marriage, Special Circumstances*, below. The pastor of the parish in which the marriage has taken place must forward this information as soon as possible to the pastor of the parish where each party was baptized (C. 1122) or to the diocese for the Military Services if required.

**6.3 Sacramental Certificates (C. 535/3):** As an authenticated (i.e. signed and sealed) transcript of the original record, every certificate shall be accurate, legible (preferably typewritten), and complete (including all notations except in cases of adoption as indicated previously in *Baptismal Registers, Adoption, Section 3.5*. The absence of information to fit an item on the printed form shall be indicated by a line or the words "none" or "not given" rather than by leaving the space blank. It is also possible to issue a signed and sealed certificate without adding the notations. Certificates of this kind must be clearly marked with the words "FOR NON-SACRAMENTAL PUPOSES" since they are not sufficient to certify the canonical status of an individual.

**6.4 Marriage, Special Circumstances:** When sacraments are administered in places other than a parish church building, in accordance with diocesan norms, it is important that the records not be "lost" in an unexpected place and be retrievable for future reference. When the wedding takes place according to canonical form, the sacramental records shall be entered and kept at the territorial parish within the boundaries of which the wedding was celebrated (GPA 6.5), **unless the place of marriage is a Catholic institution which has received permission from the Chancery to maintain its own sacramental records**. If a marriage is performed in a hospital, the necessary information is to be forwarded by the delegated cleric to the proper parish church of domicile within 24 hours (GPA 6.5). In the case of a wedding celebrated with a dispensation from canonical form, the marriage shall be recorded in two places (C. 1121/3, GPA 6.3, 6.7e): (1) in the parish of the Catholic party whose pastor prepared the couple for marriage and requested the dispensation (or at least gave permission for another priest to do so), (2) in the Chancery of the diocese which granted the dispensation from canonical form. The pre-nuptial files shall be kept in the first location. The priest who requested the dispensation is responsible for sending the usual notification of marriage to the parish of baptism of the Catholic party or parties. He is also responsible for notifying the Chancery which granted the dispensation from canonical form if the marriage was not celebrated.

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### VII. DEATH REGISTERS

**7.1 Death Records, in General:** A bound register shall be used as suggested previously in *PROCEDURES FOR THE CREATION OF SACRAMENTAL REGISTERS AND THEIR ANNOTATIONS Section 2.1*. Burial permit books do not satisfy the conditions of a permanent register. The registers shall be chronologically arranged by date of parishioner death. It shall include the date of anointing, name of anointing priest and place of burial. Additional information may include name of funeral home, next of kin and cause of death if known.

**7.2 Death, Special Circumstances:** When sacraments are administered in places other than a parish church building, in accordance with diocesan norms, it is important that the records not be "lost" in an unexpected place and be retrievable for future reference. If, as a clergyman, a priest is called upon to preside at a non-Catholic burial, an entry can be made in the parish's death records together with a notation concerning the religion of the deceased and the services which were provided. All Catholic funeral liturgies, even if celebrated outside the church building, shall be entered in the parish death records.

### VIII. PROCEDURES FOR ACCESS TO SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

**Access to Sacramental Records:** Sacramental records from after the year 1929 or those less than 80 years old are not open to examination by anyone except authorized and trained parish personnel. Records less than 80 years old may be used for statistical or quantitative research in some cases. More information regarding such cases should be sought from the diocesan archives office.

If a person is seeking his own record or has a legitimate reason to request family records or a child is seeking records concerning an infirm or incapacitated parent (legal proof of guardianship or executor status required) then authorized personnel must examine the records and issue the requested information. If a person requesting information is not known to authorized personnel then a signed request with proof of identification must be required. If the request is in writing then it must be signed and include the name of parents, date of birth and any other pertinent information which would authenticate the requestor as someone entitled to the information.

No fees should be charged for providing information from sacramental registers with the exception of a minimum handling fee for issuing a certificate (fees should always be waived if hardship is claimed).

Requests made by government/corporate agencies should be accompanied by a signed release by the person whose record is requested (or by a legal guardian).

Subpoenas or Court orders demanding the release of records should be accepted but no records should be released nor a response made until after contacting the diocesan legal counsel.

Anytime a certificate is requested by a church authority for purposes of a canonical investigation (e.g. pre-marital, Tribunal), the certificate issued should be marked clearly "For Canonical Investigation Only", preferably stamped in red ink.

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### IX. CANON LAW PERTAINING TO SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

**Canon 535** 1. Each parish is to possess a set of parish books including baptismal, marriage and death registers as well as other registers prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop; the pastor is to see to it that these registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved.

2. In the baptismal register are also to be noted the person's confirmation and whatever affects the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, with due regard for the prescription of Canon 1133, adoption, reception of sacred orders, perpetual profession in a religious institute, and change of rite; these notations are always to be noted on a document which certifies the reception of baptism

3. Each parish is to possess its own seal; documents which are issued to certify the canonical status of the Christian faithful as well as all acts which can have juridical importance are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and sealed with the parish seal.

4. Each parish is to have a registry or archive in which the parish books are kept along with Episcopal letters and other documents which ought to be preserved due to necessity or usefulness; all these are to be inspected by the diocesan bishop or his delegate during his visitation or at another suitable time; the pastor is to take care that they do not come into the hands of outsiders.

5. The older parish books are also to be carefully preserved in accord with the prescriptions of particular law.

**Canon 877** 1. The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without delay record in the baptismal books the names of those baptized making mention of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses if any and the place and date of the conferred baptism, together with an indication of the date and place of birth.

2. If it is a question of a child born of an unmarried mother, the name of the mother is to be inserted if there is public proof of her maternity or if she asks this willingly, either in writing or before two witnesses; likewise the name of the father is to be inserted if his paternity had been proved either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses; in other cases, the name of the one baptized is recorded without any indication of the name of the father or the parents.

3. If it is a question of an adopted child, the names of the adopting parents are to be recorded, and also, at least if this is to be done in the civil records of the region, the names of the natural parents, in accord with #1 and #2, with due regard for the prescription of the conference of bishops.

**Canon 878** If baptism was administered neither by the pastor nor in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor, so that he may record it in accord with Canon 877.1.

**Canon 895** The names of the confirmed with mention of the minister, the parents and the sponsors, the place and the date of the conferral of confirmation are to be noted in the confirmation register in the diocesan curia, or, where the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop has prescribed it, in a book kept in the parish archive; the pastor must advise the pastor of the place of baptism about the conferral of confirmation so that notation be made in the baptismal register, in accord with the norm of Canon 535.2.

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**Canon 1121** 1. After a marriage has been celebrated, the pastor of the place of celebration or the person who takes his place, even if neither has assisted at the marriage, should as soon as possible note the following in the marriage register: the names of the spouses, the person who assisted and the witnesses, the place and date of the marriage celebration; these notations are to be made in accord with the method prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop.

2. Whenever a marriage is contracted in accord with Canon 1116, if a priest or deacon was present at the celebration he is bound to inform the pastor or the local ordinary concerning the marriage entered as soon as possible; otherwise, the witnesses jointly with the contractants are bound to do so.

3. If the marriage has been contracted with a dispensation from canonical form, the local ordinary who granted the dispensation is to see that the dispensation and the celebration are inscribed in the marriage register at the curia and at the parish of the Catholic party whose pastor made the investigation concerning their free state; the Catholic spouse is bound to inform the same ordinary and pastor as soon as possible of the celebration of the marriage, the place of the celebration and the public form that was observed.

**Canon 1122** 1. The contracted marriage is also to be noted in the baptismal register in which the baptism of the spouses has been inscribed.

2. If the marriage was contracted in a parish where a spouse was not baptized, the pastor of the place where it was celebrated is to send a notice of the contracted marriage as soon as possible to the pastor where the baptism was conferred.