Keeping Records

From its beginning the Christian Church had emphasized the importance of keeping written records of its views, decisions, and work.\(^1\) Likewise the Reformed tradition, of which the Christian Reformed Church in North America (CRC) is one stream, has devoted, and continues to devote, resources to keeping records. As early as the Classical meeting of 19-20 January 1870 (art. 6) church leaders specifically endorsed the keeping of physical records, a practice that had been in place since before the official founding of the denomination in 1857. The questions, concerns, complaints, discussions, and decisions that led to the founding of the denomination in 1857 were carefully recorded and kept, as the minutes of Graafschap Christian Reformed Church still make clear. When the four congregations met as a classis in April 1857, they kept minutes.\(^2\) Later, some effort was extended to find those first minutes, or, at the very least, recreate them as best as was possible.\(^3\) As the denomination made clear, the reason for such record keeping was that these were a more consistent reflection of actions than later human memory.\(^4\)

Over the past 150 years the denomination has defined the office of archivist and the mandate of the archives via a series of synodical decisions. Initially, the denomination had assigned the task of preserving the official records, or archives, to a series of people. Initially the presiding officer or clerk of the meeting was responsible to keep the minutes and bring them to the next meeting for approval.\(^5\) This resulted in the records being transferred among various people over time. To give some permanence to the storage place, after the Theological School in Grand Rapids was established in 1876, its head, then Rev. Gerrit Boer, was designated the

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1 The letters of the New Testament and later the archives and libraries kept by the Roman Catholic Church, the Eastern Orthodox Church, and the Coptic Orthodox Church give the long running evidence to the importance of keeping records.

2 In the past, 8 April 1857, the date on letters sent to Classis of Holland, Reformed Church in America has been used as a proxy for the beginning of the denomination. That date, however, would have been the first time the four met and organized as a classis. The exact date of this meeting is not known because the minutes were lost. But the intention to meet was announced on 17 April 1857 and a letter explaining to the churches in the Netherlands the reasons for the secession is dated 24 April 1857 (a copy obtained from the Netherlands by Janet Sheeres, biographer of Douwe J. Vander Werf, is in the denominational archives). This letter notes that Rev. Hendrik Klijn served as the presiding officer and Rev. Koenraad Vanden Bosch as the clerk of the meeting. As a result, the first meeting was held sometime during the week of 18-24 April 1857. Since classical meetings at the time tended to be held on Wednesdays, to allow for travel to and from the meeting places, it is likely that the first classical meeting of the Christian Reformed Church took place on 22 April 1857.

3 Classical meeting 12-13 October 1864, art. 11.

4 Classical meeting 10-11 August 1870, art. 9. Until 1865 classical meetings were the highest level of church governance in the CRC. That year a second classis was organized requiring the formation of the General Assembly as the highest level of governance. In 1880 the name of the General Assembly was changed to Synod.

5 Classical meetings 3 February 1858, art. 1; and 12-13 October 1964, art. 11.
archivist. As the Theological School grew to eventually become Calvin Theological Seminary and Calvin College, sharing a common library, it was decided that the librarian serve as the archivist. As the denomination grew, so did the work of the archivist and the Denominational Historical Committee was established in 1934 to oversee work of archives and support the work of the archivist. During the post World War II years with the rapid growth of the denomination due primarily to the growth of congregations in Canada, it was decided that the archives actively conduct field work to encourage the keeping of congregational records. During the late 1950s, as the holdings in the archives grew and space become a problem, for a time the records were moved to the new denominational building and the denominational Stated Clerk was appointed archivist. In 1962 the task was returned to the seminary and college Library Director. In 1971 Synod appointed Dr. Herbert Brinks the denominational archivist in addition to his teaching history at Calvin College. Dr. Brinks retired in 1995 and in late 1997 Dr. Richard Harms was appointed full-time archivist.

Although it was clear from the beginning that classical meeting minutes (later acts of synod), reports made to those meetings, and correspondence produced by those meetings should be retained in an archives, in 1912 the first official effort was to deposit the records of discontinued classes in the archives. That year Synod commended Classis Grand Rapids East, created in 1898 when Classis Grand Rapids was divided into two, for placing the minutes of the previously undivided classis in the archives. That synod decided that the records for all discontinued ministries also should be stored in the archives. Almost four decades later all denominational agencies were encouraged to store their inactive permanent records in the archives and the next year all denominational agencies reporting to synod were mandated to send such records to the archives when those records were ten years old, unless there were compelling reasons not to do so. A decade later the work of the archives again was expanded with the charge to also collect the records of local, active congregations and microfilm their minutes, returning the originals to the congregation, so that a back-up set of records was

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6 Acts of Synod 1881, art. 21.
7 Acts of Synod 1914, art. 34.
8 Acts of Synod 1934, art. 96.
9 Acts of Synod 1952, art. 63.
13 Acts of Synod 1912, supplement.
14 Acts of Synod 1951, art. 68; Acts of Synod 1952, arts. 63 and 91.
available to local congregations should anything happen to their original set.\textsuperscript{15} By the end of the 1960s Synod instructed all denominational agencies, not just those specifically reporting to Synod, to send their inactive records to archives.\textsuperscript{16} The method of submitting records was expanded with the new technologies available and congregations were allowed to submit electronic copies of records rather than originals to the archives.\textsuperscript{17} In such cases, the archives makes the cautionary note to congregations that the confidentially of records cannot be assured for electronic records submitted via email. In 2003 Synod specifically approved the sending of all inactive membership records (records for those who died, transferred to another church, or otherwise were no longer active members) be sent to the archives, rather than being discarded.\textsuperscript{18}

To protect the privacy of individuals about whom information may be contained in certain records while also dealing with requests for conducting historical research, Synod authorized that, without exception, only agency heads, or those authorized by agency heads in writing, be granted access to confidential records.\textsuperscript{19} Access to such records for discontinued ministries or agencies was vested with the denominational archivist. A subsequent decision permits the denominational archivist to grant access to such records, if these records are more than 100 years old, but that confidentiality must be maintained by not allowing any personally identifiable information to be used.\textsuperscript{20} The methods of granting access to such records less than 100 years old was modified in 2007 when facsimile or signed emails could be used in addition to signed, original letters on agency letterhead.\textsuperscript{21}

The facility to store the official denominational archives, likewise, has changed as the mandate and holdings of the archives came to be defined. As noted, initially the presiding officers or clerks of meetings were charged with safeguarding the records and bringing them to subsequent meetings. As the volume of records increased, this arrangement became unworkable, the decision was made that the congregation hosting the synodical assembly hold the records until the next meeting.\textsuperscript{22} Although not specifically stated, the respective congregations were relieved of this records storage responsibility in 1881 when the head of the Theological School was appointed archivist with the implication that the records were to be kept

\textsuperscript{15} Acts of Synod 1962, art. 115; Acts of Synod 1966, supplement 12.
\textsuperscript{17} Acts of Synod 2002, art. 26.
\textsuperscript{18} Acts of Synod 2003, art. 17.
\textsuperscript{19} Acts of Synod 1952, art. 91.
\textsuperscript{21} Acts of Synod 2007, art. 32.
\textsuperscript{22} General Assembly 1875 minutes, art. 30.
at the Theological School. To ensure the longevity of archival records, in 1941 Synod (art. 68) mandated that all such records be keep in fire-proof storage. When the Library of the seminary and college was not able to establish such space, the archives were moved to the Christian Reformed Publishing House, until the Library had suitable space. When library space again became limited due to the rapidly increasing enrollment at the college during the 1950s, the archives were moved to the recently completed denominational building on Kalamazoo Avenue, just south of 28th Street, then just outside the Grand Rapids city limits. A few years later when the seminary and college moved to the Knollcrest Campus the archives were placed in a new facility on that campus, named Heritage Hall, which has space specifically designed for records storage.

Synod 2007 (art. 32) instructed its Historical Committee to produce a records retention document for the local congregations, including in this document a description of the information that all congregations should retain and those elements that should be included in minutes. In addition to the denominational mandates, church officers have a fiduciary responsibility for keeping records. Detailing these local, provincial, state, and federal laws and regulations is beyond the scope of this document, but every church officer must become familiar with these fiduciary responsibilities, as well.

**Record Keeping Systems**

There are many organizational systems that have been developed, and each has advantages under specific circumstances. No one system, however, is best in every situation. Organization of subject material or correspondence alphabetically by topic or name is generally effective. Minutes, outgoing correspondence (a reader file), or financial records may best be kept in chronological systems, while giving records may best be kept in a numeric system. Given the diverse nature of congregational records, a typical records system uses all of these variations, depending on the record type and may even contain a combination of systems within a single record type. For instance, voluminous correspondence files may be best kept in an alpha-chronological file, or some financial records may be best kept in an alpha-numeric file. Each congregation will have to determine which filing system best suits their needs for specific

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23 Acts of Synod 1881, art. 21.
24 Acts of Synod 1943, art. 48; and Acts of Synod 1951, art. 68.
record types. Whatever system is used, it is best to keep it as simple as possible to avoid misfiling and to allow others to readily learn the system.

Records should be stored in a secure file or room, to protect the confidentiality of the contents, and access to the records should be limited to a few, specified individuals. It is best to store records in an environment where temperature and humidity fluctuations are kept to a minimum, for paper records 68-72° F and 40-50% relative humidity are best. To prevent mold and mildew growth, records should not be kept in an area where the atmosphere is stagnant or excessively humid. Records should also be protected from extended exposure to ultraviolet radiation, which speeds chemical reactions that causes fading. Such radiation comes from direct sunlight and direct fluorescent light, reflecting such light off other surfaces or filtering such light is best. Incandescent light does not emit such radiation. To protect records from water damage do not store them directly on floors, or under plumbing pipes/lines.

Digital (computer) records have many advantages for saving space and data manipulation. But they are not yet suitable for the archival storage of information. The generally accepted standard for archival storage is the records will be retained unchanged for 50 years. Given the ever changing software and hardware used with computer records, this 50-year threshold has not yet been achieved. Test data indicate that magnetic disks and tapes begin to deteriorate after 20 years, while cds/dvds remain physically for 10 years. Silicon based storage systems (USB/Flash drives) show greater promise in meeting the 50-year retention requirement, but this has not yet been conclusively demonstrated. Even if the formats were to be viable for 50-year storage, there are still question of the readability from media. The hardware is no longer available to play many older computer tapes and cassettes, 10-inch diskettes, and 5.25-inch diskettes. The ability to retrieve data from low density or high density 3.5 inch diskettes is also rapidly fading and, with USB/flash drives, even DVD/CD storage is beginning to fade from use. Lastly, new generations of software often cannot fully read files created by other software or even previous versions of the same software. Although files that begin in digital format are
being archived, the cost for hardware, software, and back-up hardware is very expensive. As a result, the archival storage of records in the denomination is still being done in hard copy, or on micro formats (film or fiche).

This is not to say that congregations should not be using computers, software, or digital records for their purposes. When using such equipment and media be mindful of their limitations. File storage and naming protocols should be specifically stated so that all can follow these protocols uniformly. Files names like eldersmtg11-07-08, minuteselders8Oct2008, eldersmtg090708, eldersminutes2008-12-06 will be listed in widely separate locations in directory searches, once multiple years have been stored. Using one uniform file-naming system will make finding and retrieving old files much easier. When creating a new record, it is tempting to open a previous record, with its formatting protocols, but when doing this it is also easy to save the new data under the old file name, resulting in the old data being overwritten. Lastly, when new hardware or software is obtained, clerks or staff must ensure that all data to these new hardware and media.

Richard H. Harms
Archivist
2009
### Accident/injury reports
Retain 6 years after case is closed, then destroy
- Claims made by employees; occupation injuries, accidents, illnesses; safety and compliance inspections and reports; claims for reimbursement; determination orders, rulings and decisions

### Accounts payable records
Retain 3 years after audit is accepted, then destroy; if item carries a warranty, retain receipt for the lifetime of the warranty, then destroy
- Records used to track, evaluate and monitor financial transactions, including (but not limited to) purchase orders, balance sheets, bills, invoices, invoice vouchers, requisitions, payment authorizations, receipts for goods or services

### Accounts payable/receivable ledgers
Retain 7 years, then destroy

### Administrative/annual reports
Retain 1 copy permanently
- Reports of activity, accomplishments, progress by an individual or body

### Adult Society records
See: Minutes and Dues payment records

### Anniversary books/booklets/programs
Send one copy to archives and retain one copy permanently

### Annual reports
See: Administrative/annual reports

### Applications rejected/unsolicited
Retain 1 year, then destroy

### Architectural records
Retain permanently
- Includes blueprints, building designs, specifications

### Articles of Incorporation and bylaws
Retain permanently (copy is file with state/provincial agency), send to denominational archives once for microfilming
- A congregation’s Articles of Incorporation/Association generally provide information such as: name, names of the people organizing the corporation/association, that it is a non-stock, non-profit body (non-profit status may require Internal Revenue certification), the location of the congregation’s “registered office”; articles of incorporation/association vary widely from one jurisdiction to another, but generally do not go into great detail about operations, which are spelled out in more detail in a the bylaws.

### Assessments/Surveys/Vision files
Retain one copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years
Attendance Records
  Catechism classes
  Sunday School classes
  Retain 3 years, then destroy

Audio recordings
  See: Recordings

Audio-Visual recordings
  See: Recordings or Photographs

Audit reports
  Retain permanently
  Opines on whether the financial information presented is correct and free of material misstatements; provides neither evaluation nor opinion as to the financial health, performance, or any other similar attributes of a congregation

Balance sheet ledger
  Retain 7 years, then destroy
  Summarizes assets, equity and liabilities at a specific point in time

Balance sheets, monthly/quarterly
  Retain 1 year, then destroy

Balance sheets, annual
  See: Accounts Payable records

Bank deposit slips
  Retain 3 years, then destroy

Bank deposits
  Retain 7 years, then destroy

Bank reconciliation statements
  Retain 7 years, then destroy

Bible Class curricula
  See: Curricular files

Bible Class minutes
  See: Minutes

Bills
  See: Accounts payable records

Board of Management minutes
  See: Minutes

Board of Trustees minutes
  See: Minutes

Bonds
  Retain 7 years after date of redemption, then destroy
  A debt security, which may have been issued or purchased by a congregation, by which a seller owes the holder a debt and is obligated to repay the debt plus interest at a later date

Budgets – annual
  Retain 7 years, then destroy

Budgets – monthly/quarterly
  Retain 1 year, then destroy
### Building (property) files
See: Property records

### Bulletins
Retain permanently
Contains a chronological record of events and people that will be invaluable when reviewing the congregation's history

### Bylaws
See: Articles of Incorporation and bylaws
Bylaws (also spelled by-laws or byelaws) passed by a congregation, as authorized by state/provincial laws, that regulate the operation of the congregation; typically congregational bylaws contain: name, purpose, members, officers, meetings, executive board(s), committees, parliamentary authority, amendments, in summary these detail operations of the congregation

### Cadets
See: Minutes, Curricula files, and Office/Subject files

### Calvinettes
See: GEMS/Calvinettes

### Canceled checks
Retain 7 years, then destroy; official receipts should be obtained for the satisfaction of all obligations – canceled checks should not be used as proxies for such receipts

### Cash journal
If posted to a general ledger retain 7 years, then destroy; if not posted to a general ledger retain permanently
Record of original accounting entries, where transactions are recorded in chronological order; generally entries from the cash journal later entered into the balance sheet ledger

### Cash receipts
See: Accounts payable records

### Catechism class attendance
See: Attendance Records

### Catechism curricula
See: Curricula files

### Ceremony files
Retain one copy permanently

### Certificates of deposit
Retain 3 years after redemption, then destroy

### Charter members list
Retain one copy permanently

### Check register
Retain 3 years after last entry, then destroy

### Checks – canceled
Retain 7 years, then destroy

### Church Visitors’ reports
Retain permanently
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Record Type</th>
<th>Retention Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classical minutes</td>
<td>Retain 1 year, then destroy (permanent copy kept by stated clerk of classis and/or the archives)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clippings</td>
<td>Photocopy onto bond paper; retain copy permanently, destroy original</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committee records</td>
<td>Retain narratives permanently; see also: Minutes; financial records. See: under the appropriate financial record type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints</td>
<td>Retain permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Formal complaints brought to the congregation's governing body, investigation of the complaint, and resolution of those complaints (NOTE: maintaining confidentiality must be considered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational meeting minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational self studies/surveys</td>
<td>Retain results report permanently; raw data can be destroyed when result report is accepted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congregational profile/Demographic studies</td>
<td>Retain one copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistory minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction records</td>
<td>Retain 3 years after facility is replaced or sold, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May contain contracts, specifications, architectural drawings, correspondence, payments/payment authorizations, permits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts/Leases for services, repairs, maintenance</td>
<td>Retain 3 years after termination, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracts for construction</td>
<td>See: Construction records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cookbooks</td>
<td>Retain one copy permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence – general</td>
<td>Retain 2 years, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence – legal</td>
<td>Retain permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Correspondence – letters of call</td>
<td>Retain permanently calls accepted; others destroy after 1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Retention Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couples Club minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit card records</td>
<td>Retain 7 years, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curricula files</td>
<td>Retain 3 years after last use, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters of Pricilla minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deacons’ minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedications files</td>
<td>See: Ceremony files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deeds/Easements/Conveyance</td>
<td>See: Property records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demographic Studies</td>
<td>Retain one copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital/Electronic records</td>
<td>Same criteria as for paper record categories; be aware of the need to update files based on hardware and/or software changes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital images</td>
<td>See: Photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Digital recordings</td>
<td>See: Recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directories – membership</td>
<td>Retain one copy permanently (NOTE: maintaining confidentiality must be considered)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability records (not Workmen’s Compensation claims)</td>
<td>See: personnel records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary actions – employees</td>
<td>See: personnel records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disciplinary actions – members</td>
<td>Retain permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Correspondence, meeting notes, decisions, appeals, notices having to do with discipline of members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discipline Committee minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dorcas Society minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dues payment records</td>
<td>Retain 3 years, then destroy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Education Committee minutes  See: Minutes
Elders’ minutes  See: Minutes
Employee term contracts  Retain 7 years after termination, then destroy
Employee evaluations  See: Personnel records
Employee medical complaints  See: Personnel records
Employee medical records  See: Personnel records
Employee salary schedules  Retain 7 years after termination, then destroy
Environmental test records/reports  Retain permanently
Equipment inventories  Update regularly, destroy old inventories after 1 year
Equipment leases  See: Contracts/Leases for services, repairs,
Evaluations  See: Personnel files
Evangelism/Outreach files  Retain 3 years, then destroy
Family Visitation records  Retain 3 years, destroy – Be mindful there may be a need to protect confidentiality
Financial records  See specific record type:
  Accounts payable records
  Accounts payable/receivable ledgers
  Audit reports
  Balance sheet ledger
  Balance sheets, monthly/quarterly
  Balance sheets, annual
  Bank deposit slips
  Bank deposits
  Bank reconciliation statements
  Bonds
  Budgets - annual
  Budgets - monthly/quarterly
  Canceled checks
  Cash journal
  Cash receipts
  Certificates of deposit
  Check register
  Checks - canceled
  Credit card records
  Dues payment records
General ledger
Giving envelopes
Giving records
Grant-in-Aid files
Invoice vouchers
Invoices
Invoices for major building construction
Journal entry sheets/ledger
Ledgers
Loan records
Payroll records
Purchase orders
Receipts for goods or services
Receipts for satisfaction of obligations/debts
Requisitions
Tax records/Returns
Trial balances

Farewells
See: Ceremony files

Fellowship Committee minutes
See: Minutes

Finance Committee minutes
See: Minutes

GEMS/Calvinettes
See: Minutes, Curricula files, and Office/Subject files

General ledger
Retain 7 years, then destroy
The main accounting record that usually includes such items as current assets, fixed assets, liabilities, revenue and expense items, gains, and losses

Giving envelopes
Destroy, once information has been transferred to giving records

Giving records
Retain 7 years, then destroy
Contains the names of donors, date and amount of donation

Grant-in-Aid files
Retain 7 years after the granting period ends, make sure are required reports have been filed with the granting agency before destroying records

Gravamen
Retain 3 years after resolution, then destroy (classical or synodical file will be retained permanently)

Grievance(s) to be redressed, or calling attention to breach(es) in church discipline presented by a lower body to a higher body for decision; individuals may not submit a gravamen, to proceed individual grievances must be taken up by the individual’s council, which in turn must decide to submit

Groundbreaking ceremony files
See: Ceremony files
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Retention Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guest Registers</td>
<td>Retain as desired – contains the anecdotal data of who visited and when, but such data seldom has long-term historic value</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical file</td>
<td>Retain permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May contain newspaper/periodical clippings, manuscript and/or published history, personal recollections, images, recordings, programs, etc. that document the history of the congregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorporation documents</td>
<td>See: Articles of Incorporation/Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Installation files</td>
<td>See: Ceremony files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance policies</td>
<td>Retain permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoice vouchers</td>
<td>See: Accounts payable records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoices</td>
<td>See: Accounts payable records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invoices for major building construction</td>
<td>Retain as long as structure is extant, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal entry sheets/ledger</td>
<td>Retain 7 years, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Log of transcriptions into accounting journal that can consist of several items, each of which is either a debit or a credit; journal entries directly change the account balances on the general ledger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Circle minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior Guild minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junior League minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leases</td>
<td>See: Contracts/Leases for services, repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maintenance, equipment, facilities, services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ledgers</td>
<td>See: specific ledger type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Litigation files</td>
<td>Retain 7 years, transfer to archives (the courts will also keep a complete set)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Litigation in which the congregation was a party that may include such items as legal opinions, briefs, correspondence, affidavits, photographs, reports, appeals, decisions, and other court documents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan records</td>
<td>Retain 7 years after date of redemption, then destroy; See: also Bonds</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Congregational Records Management

Manuals - equipment
Retain as long as equipment is owned, then destroy

Manuals – instruction
Retain one copy permanently

Mary/Martha Circle minutes
See: Minutes

Member self studies/surveys
See: Congregational self studies/survey

Membership records
Retain until membership become inactive, then transfer to archives
Register or loose records that record member names, births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, etc.

Men’s Society records
See: Minutes and Dues payment records

Ministry Board minutes
See: Minutes

Ministry Committee minutes
See: Minutes

Minutes
Retain permanently – at least once every ten years send to the denominational archives for microfilming (NOTE: maintaining confidentiality must be considered)

Each set of minutes should include:
1) the name of the church and organization (congregation, council, elders, deacons, etc.)
2) the date and place of the meeting
3) the names of those who were present – in the case of a congregational meeting rather than all the names it should be noted that a quorum was present
4) the time of the opening of the meeting
5) the action taken on each item (approved, not approved, accepted as information, etc.)
6) the vote on each item (passed unanimously, failed 4-6, etc.)
7) the time of the closing of the meeting.
Includes (but not limited to) are minutes from such meetings as:
- Congregation
- Council27
- Elders
- Deacons
- Executive committee/groups
- Committees – Permanent
- Committees – Ad Hoc
- Societies
- Clubs
- Other decision-making bodies

Mortgage documents
Retain until official receipt is received noting the discharge the mortgage has been filed; retain certificate of filing and mortgage permanently – burn only copies

27 In the Reformed tradition the term “consistory” has been used to refer to a congregation’s elected ruling body; in some cases it referred to ruling elders, in other cases it was used to refer to a body of both elders and deacons. To avoid this potential for confusion, this document will use “council” to refer to a congregation’s ruling body composed of elders and deacons.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Document Category</th>
<th>Retention Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Club minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsletters</td>
<td>Retain one copy permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nursery Committee minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office files/subject files</td>
<td>Review annually: retain only those that document significant congregational activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ordination files</td>
<td>See: Ceremony files</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization of congregation</td>
<td>Retain permanently</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Flow Charts</td>
<td>Retain until superseded, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation/Instructions for Office Holders</td>
<td>Retain until superseded, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach/Evangelism Committee minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach/Evangelism files</td>
<td>Retain 3 years, then destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overtures</td>
<td>Retain 3 years after resolution, then destroy (classical or synodical file will be kept)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission of a question or proposal by a lower body to a higher body such as classis or synod for resolution; as with a gravamen, individuals may not submit overtures, to proceed individual questions or proposals must be taken up by the individual’s council, which in turn can decide to submit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Care Committee minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Deacons’ minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pastoral Elders’ minutes</td>
<td>See: Minutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payment authorizations</td>
<td>See: Accounts payable records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Payroll records</td>
<td>Retain 7 years, then destroy; see also: Time records</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Includes payroll registers, summary schedule of earnings, deductions, permanent earnings, and accrued leave</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel records</td>
<td>Send to archives after person is no longer active; biographical and genealogical data retained permanently; the remainder is kept 25 years then destroyed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A file should be maintained for each active employee containing:
1) Employee application
2) Job description (replace when superseded)
Christian Reformed Church in North America
Congregational Records Management

3) Resume
4) Tax eligibility verification and other information (replace when superseded)
5) Salary information
6) Sick leave record
7) Vacation record
8) Regular performance evaluations
9) Resignation
10) Medical records

Note: These records are confidential. In many states/provinces, employees and former employees have the right to inspect their own personnel files. The employer has the right to require that the request be in writing and has a stated number of working days to comply with the request. Items likely to be in a personnel file that specifically are excluded from mandatory employee inspection in many states:
1) Letters of reference
2) Testing results
3) Differences with another employee, release of which information may be an invasion of privacy of the other employee
4) Legal or criminal files

Petitions Retain with the resolution of the issue permanently

Photographs (not relating to congregation) Destroy when no longer needed

Photographs (relating to congregation) Retain permanently

Pledge registers/ledgers Retain 1 year after pledge campaign has been completed, then destroy,

Policy Statements Retain until superseded, then destroy

Programming files Retain 3 year after programming end, keep a summary, destroy the remainder

Promotional/outreach material Retain until superseded, then destroy

Property records Retain permanently until property is sold; send to denominational archives once for microfilming

Includes such items as property appraisals, abstracts, deeds, title searches, easements, conveyances, surveys, contracts, agreements

Purchase orders See: Accounts payable records

Real Estate records See: Property records

Receipts for goods or services See: Accounts payable records
Receipts for satisfaction of obligations/debts Retain permanently
Includes the redemption of loans, satisfactions of mortgages/land contracts

Recordings – audio
Worship services, retain no longer than 1 year, then re-record, unless there is/are compelling reason(s) to keep the recording longer, be mindful that hardware and software development may quickly render formats obsolete

Recordings – video
Retain longer than 1 year only if it documents some aspect of the history of the congregation, unless there is/are compelling reason(s) to keep the recording longer, be mindful that hardware and software development may quickly render formats obsolete

Reports to council
Retain permanently

Refugee Committee minutes
See: Minutes

Remodeling
See: Construction records

Reports – congregation
Retain one copy permanently

Reports – non-congregational
Retain 1 year, destroy

Requisitions
See: Accounts payable records

Retirement benefits
See: Personnel records

Retirement programs
See: Ceremony file

Retirement tributes
See: Ceremony files

Ruth Circle minutes
See: Minutes

Safety deposit container records
Retain as long as container is leased, then destroy

Safety deposit contents
Retain permanently

Search Committee files
Retain 3 years, keep files relating to person hired with Personnel records: destroy remainder

Search Committee minutes
See: Minutes

Senior Guild minutes
See: Minutes
Service Elders minutes  See: Minutes
Service Leaders minutes  See: Minutes
Shepherd Elders minutes  See: Minutes
Shepherd Leaders minutes  See: Minutes
Steering Committee minutes  See: Minutes
Subject files  See: Office files/subject files
Sunday School class attendance  See: Attendance Records
Sunday School curricula  See: Curricula files
Task Forces files  Retain one copy of final report permanently
Tax exemption certificates  Retain permanently
State/provincial/federal income, excise, property, sales/use, etc.)
Tax records/Returns  Retain 7 years, then destroy
Termination records  See: Personnel records
Time & attendance records/cards/sheets  Retain 3 years from date of filing, then destroy
Title search papers and certificates  See: Property records
Toxic/hazardous substance reports  Retain permanently
Trial balances  Retain 3 years after audit is accepted, then destroy
A worksheet listing the balance of each ledger account in two columns (debit and credit) on a specific date
Trust Agreements  Retain 3 years past the life of the trusts, destroy
Vacation Bible School attendance  See: Attendance Records
Vacation Bible School curricula  see Curricula files
Video recordings  See: Recordings
Vision files
Retain one copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years

Wage and Tax Withholding Statements
retain 7 years from date of filing, then destroy
Local/State/Provincial/Federal required forms

Warranties
Retain until expiration, then destroy

Women’s Association minutes
See: Minutes

Women’s Society records
See: Minutes and Dues payment records

Workers’ compensation records
Retain 12 years after injury (filing), death, or last compensation payment

Worship Committee minutes
See: Minutes

Yearbooks – denominational
Retain as needed; archives maintains a permanent set

Young Ladies’ Society minutes
See: Minutes

Young Men’s Society minutes
See: Minutes

Young People’s Society minutes
See: Minutes

Youth Society records
See: Minutes and Dues payment records