

# Christian Reformed Church in North America Congregational Records Management

## I. Keeping records

From its beginning the Christian church has emphasized the importance of keeping written records of its views, decisions, and work.<sup>1</sup> 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 January 19-20, 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 were carefully recorded and kept, as the minutes of Graafschap CRC still make clear. When the four founding congregations met as a classis in April 1857, they kept minutes, which were unfortunately lost.<sup>2</sup> Later, some effort was extended to find those first minutes, or, at the very least, to recreate them as best as was possible.<sup>3</sup> As the denomination made clear, the reason for keeping records was that these provided a more consistent reflection of actions than later human memory.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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 long running evidence to the importance of keeping records.

<sup>2</sup> In past years April 8, 1857, the date on letters sent to the Classis of Holland, Reformed Church in America, has been used as a proxy for the beginning of the CRC denomination. The true date of beginning, however, would have been the first time the four met and organized as a classis. The exact date of that meeting is not known because the minutes were lost. But the intention to meet was announced on April 17, 1857, and a letter explaining to the churches in the Netherlands the reasons for the secession is dated April 24, 1857 (a copy obtained from the Netherlands by Janet Sheeres, biographer of Douwe J. Vander Werp, 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 April 18-24, 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 April 22, 1857.

<sup>3</sup> Classical meeting, October 12-13, 1864, Art. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Classical meeting, August 10-11, 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.

<sup>5</sup> Classical meetings, February 3, 1858, Art. 1; and October 12-13, 1964, Art. 11.

1876, its head, then Rev. Gerrit Boer, was designated the archivist.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup>

As the denomination grew, so did the work of the archivist. The denominational Historical Committee was established in 1934 to oversee the archives and support the work of the archivist.<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> During the late 1950s, as the holdings in the archives grew and space became a problem, for a time the records were moved to the new denominational building and the denominational stated clerk was appointed archivist.<sup>10</sup> In 1962 the task was returned to the seminary and college library director. Synod 1971 appointed Dr. Herbert Brinks the denominational archivist in addition to teaching history at Calvin College.<sup>11</sup> Dr. Brinks retired in 1995, and in late 1997 Dr. Richard Harms was appointed full-time archivist.<sup>12</sup>

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 archive, in 1912 the first official effort was made 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.<sup>13</sup> 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.<sup>14</sup> 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 available to local congregations should anything happen to their original

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<sup>6</sup> *Acts of Synod 1881*, Art. 21.

<sup>7</sup> *Acts of Synod 1914*, Art. 34.

<sup>8</sup> *Acts of Synod 1934*, Art. 96.

<sup>9</sup> *Acts of Synod 1952*, Art. 63.

<sup>10</sup> *Acts of Synod 1958*, Art. 71.

<sup>11</sup> *Acts of Synod 1971*, Art. 164.

<sup>12</sup> *Agenda for Synod 1998*, pp. 29-30.

<sup>13</sup> *Acts of Synod 1912*, supplement.

<sup>14</sup> *Acts of Synod 1951*, Art. 68; *Acts of Synod 1952*, Art. 63 and 91.

set.<sup>15</sup> By the end of the 1960s synod instructed all denominational agencies, not just those specifically reporting to synod, to send their inactive records to the archives.<sup>16</sup> The method of submitting records expanded with new technologies available, and congregations were allowed to submit electronic copies of records rather than originals to the archives.<sup>17</sup> In such cases, the archives makes the cautionary note to congregations that the confidentiality of records cannot be assured for electronic records submitted via email. Synod 2003 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) to the archives rather than being discarded.<sup>18</sup>

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.<sup>19</sup> 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 those records are more than 100 years old, but confidentiality must be maintained by not allowing any personally identifiable information to be used.<sup>20</sup> The methods of granting access to records less than 100 years old was modified in 2007 when facsimile or signed email could be used in addition to signed, original letters on agency letterhead.<sup>21</sup>

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 records and bringing them to subsequent meetings. As the volume of records increased, this arrangement became unworkable, so the decision was made that the congregation hosting the synodical assembly hold the records until the next meeting.<sup>22</sup> 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 at the Theological School.<sup>23</sup> To ensure the longevity of archival records, Synod 1941 (Art. 68) mandated that all such

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<sup>15</sup> *Acts of Synod 1962*, Art. 115; *Acts of Synod 1966*, supplement 12.

<sup>16</sup> *Acts of Synod 1969*, Art. 109.

<sup>17</sup> *Acts of Synod 2002*, Art. 26.

<sup>18</sup> *Acts of Synod 2003*, Art. 17.

<sup>19</sup> *Acts of Synod 1952*, Art. 91.

<sup>20</sup> *Acts of Synod 2000*, Art. 26.

<sup>21</sup> *Acts of Synod 2007*, Art. 32.

<sup>22</sup> General Assembly 1875 minutes, Art. 30.

<sup>23</sup> *Acts of Synod 1881*, Art. 21.

records be kept in fireproof 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.<sup>24</sup> 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 28th Street at Kalamazoo Avenue, then just outside the Grand Rapids city limits.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup>

Synod 2007 (Art. 32) instructed the 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 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.

## **II. 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 its needs for specific record types. Whatever system is used, it is best to keep the system as simple as possible to avoid misfiling and to allow others to readily learn it.

Records should be stored in a secure file or room, to protect the confidentiality of the contents, and access to 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—68-72° F and 40-50 percent relative humidity are best for paper records. 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 cause fading. Such radiation comes from direct sunlight and direct

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<sup>24</sup> *Acts of Synod 1943*, Art. 48; *Acts of Synod 1951*, Art. 68.

<sup>25</sup> *Acts of Synod 1958*, Art. 71.

<sup>26</sup> *Acts of Synod 1962*, Art. 115.

fluorescent light, so 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 space saving and data manipulation. But they are not yet suitable for the archival storage of information. The generally accepted standard for archival storage is that the records will be retained unchanged for 50 years. Given the everchanging 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 reliable 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 questions about readability from various media. For example, the hardware is no longer available to play many older computer tapes and cassettes, 8-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. Finally, new generations of software often cannot fully read files created by other software or even previous versions of the same-brand software. Although files created 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 on hard copy or in 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, however, be mindful of their limitations. File storage and naming protocols should be clearly stated so that all can follow those protocols uniformly. File names like eldersmtg11-07-08, minuteselders8Oct2008, eldersmtg090708, and eldersminutes2008-12-06 will be listed in widely separate locations in directory searches, once multiple years of records 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 so it is also easy to save new data under the old filename, resulting in old data being overwritten. Finally, when new hardware or software is obtained, clerks or staff must ensure that all data are transferred to the new hardware and media.

**Accident/injury reports**

Retain 6 years after case is closed, then destroy

Claims made by employees such as 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

<b>Accounts payable/receivable ledgers</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
<b>Administrative/annual reports</b> Reports of activity, accomplishments, progress by an individual or body	Retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Adult Society records</b>	See Minutes and Dues payment records
<b>Anniversary books/booklets/programs</b>	Send 1 copy to archives and retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Annual reports</b>	See Administrative/annual reports
<b>Applications rejected/unsolicited</b>	Retain 1 year, then destroy
<b>Architectural records</b> Includes blueprints, building designs, specifications	Retain permanently
<b>Articles of Incorporation and bylaws</b>  A congregation's Articles of Incorporation/Association generally provide information such as name, names of the people organizing the corporation/association, whether 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 the bylaws.	Retain permanently (copy is filed with state/provincial agency), send to denominational archives once for microfilming
<b>Assessments/surveys/vision files</b>	Retain 1 copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years
<b>Attendance records</b> Catechism classes Sunday school classes	Retain 3 years, then destroy
<b>Audio recordings</b>	See Recordings
<b>Audio-visual recordings</b>	See Recordings and Photographs
<b>Audit reports</b> Renders an opinion 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	Retain permanently
<b>Balance sheet ledger</b> Summarizes assets, equity, and liabilities at a specific point in time	Retain 7 years, then destroy
<b>Balance sheets, monthly/quarterly</b>	Retain 1 year, then destroy
<b>Balance sheets, annual</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Bank deposit slips</b>	Retain 3 years, then destroy
<b>Bank deposits</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
<b>Bank reconciliation statements</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
<b>Bible class curricula</b>	See Curricular files

<b>Bible class minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Bills</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Board of Management minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Board of Trustees minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Bonds</b>	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
<b>Budgets – annual</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
<b>Budgets – monthly/quarterly</b>	Retain 1 year, then destroy
<b>Building (property) files</b>	See Property records
<b>Bulletins</b>	Retain permanently Contain a chronological record of events and people that will be invaluable when reviewing the congregation's history
<b>Bylaws</b>	See Articles of Incorporation and bylaws Bylaws (also spelled <i>by-laws</i> or <i>byelaws</i> ) 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
<b>Cadets</b>	See Minutes, Curricular files, and Office files/subject files
<b>Calvinettes</b>	See GEMS/Calvinettes
<b>Canceled checks</b>	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
<b>Cash journal</b>	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
<b>Cash receipts</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Catechism class attendance</b>	See Attendance records
<b>Catechism curricula</b>	See Curricular files
<b>Ceremony files</b>	Retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Certificates of deposit</b>	Retain 3 years after redemption, then destroy
<b>Charter members list</b>	Retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Check register</b>	Retain 3 years after last entry, then destroy

<b>Checks – canceled</b>	See Canceled checks
<b>Church Visitors’ reports</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Classical minutes</b>	Retain 1 year, then destroy (permanent copy kept by stated clerk of classis and/or the archives)
<b>Clippings</b>	Photocopy onto bond paper; retain copy permanently, destroy original
<b>Committee records</b>	Retain narratives permanently; see <i>also</i> Minutes; Financial records. See under the appropriate records type
<b>Complaints</b>	Retain permanently
	Formal complaints brought to the congregation’s governing body, investigation of the complaint, and resolution of those complaints ( <i>Note</i> : maintaining confidentiality must be considered)
<b>Congregational meeting minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Congregational self-studies/surveys</b>	Retain results report permanently; raw data can be destroyed when results report is accepted
<b>Congregational profile/demographic studies</b>	Retain 1 copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years
<b>Consistory minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Construction records</b>	Retain 3 years after facility is replaced or sold, then destroy
	May contain contracts, specifications, architectural drawings, correspondence, payments/payment authorizations, permits
<b>Contracts/leases for services, repairs</b>	Retain 3 years after termination, then destroy
<b>Contracts for construction</b>	See Construction records
<b>Cookbooks</b>	Retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Correspondence – general</b>	Retain 2 years, then destroy
<b>Correspondence – legal</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Correspondence – letters of call</b>	Retain permanently calls accepted; destroy others after 1 year
<b>Council minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Couples Club minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Credit card records</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
<b>Curricular files</b>	Retain 3 years after last use, then destroy
	Catechism
	Sunday school

<b>Daughters of Priscilla minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Deacons' minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Dedications files</b>	See Ceremony files
<b>Deeds/Easements/Conveyance</b> Instruments that transfer or exchange title to real estate, or reserve the rights to property during a transfer or exchange	See Property records
<b>Demographic studies</b>	Retain 1 copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years
<b>Digital/electronic records</b>	Same criteria as for paper record categories; be aware of the need to update files based on hardware and/or software changes
<b>Digital images</b>	See Photographs
<b>Digital recordings</b>	See Recordings
<b>Directories – membership</b>	Retain 1 copy permanently ( <i>Note: maintaining confidentiality must be considered</i> )
<b>Disability records</b> (not Workers' compensation claims)	See personnel records or Workers' compensation records
<b>Disciplinary actions – employees</b>	See personnel records
<b>Disciplinary actions – members</b> Correspondence, meeting notes, decisions, appeals, notices having to do with discipline of members	Retain permanently
<b>Discipline Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Dorcas Society minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Dues payment records</b>	Retain 3 years, then destroy
<b>Education Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Elders' minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Employee term contracts</b>	Retain 7 years after termination, then destroy
<b>Employee evaluations</b>	See Personnel records
<b>Employee medical complaints</b>	See Personnel records
<b>Employee medical records</b>	See Personnel records
<b>Employee salary schedules</b>	Retain 7 years after termination, then destroy
<b>Environmental test records/reports</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Equipment inventories</b>	Update regularly, destroy old inventories after 1 year

<b>Equipment leases</b>	See Contracts/leases for services, repairs
<b>Evaluations</b>	See Personnel files
<b>Evangelism/outreach files</b>	Retain 3 years, then destroy
<b>Family Visitation records</b>	Retain 3 years, then destroy ( <i>Note</i> : maintaining confidentiality must be considered)
<b>Farewells</b>	See Ceremony files
<b>Fellowship Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Finance Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Financial records</b>	See specific record type (i.e., Accounts payable records, Audit reports, Bank deposits, Invoices, Loan records, Tax records, and so forth)
<b>GEMS/Calvinettes</b>	See Minutes, Curricular files, and Office files/subject files
<b>General ledger</b>	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
<b>Giving envelopes</b>	Destroy after information has been transferred to giving records
<b>Giving records</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
	Contains the names of donors and the dates and amounts of donations
<b>Grant-in-Aid files</b>	Retain 7 years after the granting period ends, make sure all required reports have been filed with the granting agency before destroying records
<b>Gravamen</b>	Retain 3 years after resolution, then destroy (classical or synodical file will be retained permanently)
	Grievance(s) to be redressed, 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; individual grievances must be taken up by the individual's council, which in turn must decide to submit
<b>Groundbreaking ceremony files</b>	See Ceremony files
<b>Guest registers</b>	Retain as desired – contains anecdotal data of who visited and when, but such data seldom have long-term historic value
<b>Historical file</b>	Retain permanently
	May contain newspaper/periodical clippings, manuscript and/or published history, personal recollections, images, recordings, programs, and so forth, that document the history of the congregation
<b>Incorporation documents</b>	See Articles of Incorporation
<b>Installation files</b>	See Ceremony files

<b>Insurance policies</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Invoice vouchers</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Invoices</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Invoices for major building construction</b>	Retain as long as structure is extant, then destroy
<b>Journal entry sheets/ledger</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
	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
<b>Joy Circle minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Junior Guild minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Junior League minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Leases</b>	See Contracts/leases for services, repairs
	Maintenance, equipment, facilities, services
<b>Ledgers</b>	See specific ledger type
<b>Litigation files</b>	Retain 7 years, transfer to archives (the courts will also keep a complete set)
	Litigation in which the congregation was a party that may include legal opinions, briefs, correspondence, affidavits, photographs, reports, appeals, decisions, and other court documents
<b>Loan records</b>	Retain 7 years after date of redemption, then destroy; see <i>also</i> Bonds
<b>Manuals - equipment</b>	Retain as long as equipment is owned, then destroy
<b>Manuals – instruction</b>	Retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Mary/Martha Circle minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Member self-studies/surveys</b>	See Congregational self-studies/surveys
<b>Membership records</b>	Retain until membership becomes inactive, then transfer to archives
	Register or files that record member names, births, baptisms, marriages, deaths, and so forth
<b>Men’s Society records</b>	See Minutes and Dues payment records
<b>Ministry Board minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Ministry Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Minutes</b>	Retain permanently—once every 10 years send to the denominational archives for microfilming ( <i>Note</i> : maintaining confidentiality must be considered)

Each set of minutes should include

- 1) the name of the church and organization (e.g., congregation, council, elders, deacons)
- 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 (e.g., approved, not approved, accepted as information)
- 6) the vote on each item (e.g., passed unanimously, failed 4-6)
- 7) the time of the closing of the meeting.

Includes (but is not limited to) minutes from such meetings as

- Congregation
- Council<sup>27</sup>
- Elders
- Deacons
- Executive committee/groups
- Committees – Permanent
- Committees – Ad Hoc
- Societies
- Clubs
- Other decision-making bodies

<b>Mortgage documents</b>	Retain until official receipt is received noting the discharge of the mortgage has been filed; retain certificate of filing and mortgage permanently – burn only copies
<b>Mr. &amp; Mrs. Club minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Newsletters</b>	Retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Nursery Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Office files/subject files</b>	Review annually; retain only those that document significant congregational activities
<b>Ordination files</b>	See Ceremony files
<b>Organization of congregation</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Organizational Flow Charts</b>	Retain until superseded, then destroy
<b>Orientation/Instructions for office holders</b>	Retain until superseded, then destroy
<b>Outreach/Evangelism Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Outreach/Evangelism files</b>	Retain 3 years, then destroy
<b>Overtures</b>	Retain 3 years after resolution, then destroy (classical or synodical file will be kept)
	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; individual questions or proposals must be taken up by the individual's council, which in turn can decide to submit
<b>Pastoral Care Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes

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<sup>27</sup> 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.

<b>Pastoral Deacons' minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Pastoral Elders' minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Payment authorizations</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Payroll records</b> Includes payroll registers, summary schedule of earnings, deductions, permanent earnings, and accrued leave	Retain 7 years, then destroy; <i>see also</i> Time records
<b>Personnel records</b>	Send to archives after person is no longer active; biographical and genealogical data retained permanently; the remainder is kept 25 years, then destroyed
A file should be maintained for each active employee, containing	
1) Employee application	
2) Job description (replace when superseded)	
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	
<i>Note:</i> 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	
<b>Petitions</b>	Retain with the resolution of the issue permanently
<b>Photographs</b> (not relating to congregation)	Destroy when no longer needed
<b>Photographs</b> (relating to congregation)	Retain permanently
<b>Pledge registers/ledgers</b>	Retain 1 year after pledge campaign has been completed, then destroy
<b>Policy Statements</b>	Retain until superseded, then destroy
<b>Programming files</b>	Retain 3 years after programming end, keep a summary, destroy the remainder
<b>Promotional/outreach material</b>	Retain until superseded, then destroy
<b>Property records</b>	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

<b>Purchase orders</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Real estate records</b>	See Property records
<b>Receipts for goods or services</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Receipts for satisfaction of obligations/debts</b>	Retain permanently Includes the redemption of loans, satisfactions of mortgages/land contracts
<b>Recordings – audio</b>	Worship services, retain no longer than 1 year, then re-record; unless there is/are compelling reason(s) to keep the original recording longer, be mindful that hardware and software development may quickly render formats obsolete
<b>Recordings – video</b>	Retain longer than 1 year if it documents some aspect of the history of the congregation; unless there is/are compelling reason(s) to keep the recording indefinitely, be mindful that hardware and software development may quickly render formats obsolete
<b>Reports to council</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Refugee Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Remodeling</b>	See Construction records
<b>Reports – congregation</b>	Retain 1 copy permanently
<b>Reports – non-congregational</b>	Retain 1 year, then destroy
<b>Requisitions</b>	See Accounts payable records
<b>Retirement benefits</b>	See Personnel records
<b>Retirement programs</b>	See Ceremony files
<b>Retirement tributes</b>	See Ceremony files
<b>Ruth Circle minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Safety deposit container records</b>	Retain as long as container is leased, then destroy
<b>Safety deposit contents</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Search Committee files</b>	Retain 3 years; keep files relating to person hired with Personnel records; destroy remainder
<b>Search Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Senior Guild minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Service Elders minutes</b>	See Minutes

<b>Service Leaders minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Shepherd Elders minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Shepherd Leaders minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Steering Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Subject files</b>	See Office files/subject files
<b>Sunday school attendance</b>	See Attendance records
<b>Sunday school curricula</b>	See Curricular files
<b>Task forces files</b>	Retain 1 copy of final report permanently
<b>Tax exemption certificates</b> State/provincial/federal income, excise, property, sales/use, and so forth	Retain permanently
<b>Tax records/returns</b>	Retain 7 years, then destroy
<b>Termination records</b>	See Personnel records
<b>Time and attendance records/cards/sheets</b>	Retain 3 years from date of filing, then destroy
<b>Title search papers and certificates</b>	See Property records
<b>Toxic/hazardous substance reports</b>	Retain permanently
<b>Trial balances</b> A worksheet listing the balance of each ledger account in two columns (debit and credit) on a specific date	Retain 3 years after audit is accepted, then destroy
<b>Trust Agreements</b>	Retain 3 years past the life of the trusts, then destroy
<b>Vacation Bible School attendance</b>	See Attendance records
<b>Vacation Bible School curricula</b>	See Curricular files
<b>Video recordings</b>	See Recordings
<b>Vision files</b>	Retain 1 copy of the summary report permanently; then destroy the remainder after 3 years
<b>Wage and Tax Withholding statements</b> Local/State/Provincial/Federal required forms	Retain 7 years from date of filing, then destroy
<b>Warranties</b>	Retain until expiration, then destroy
<b>Women's Association minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Women's Society records</b>	See Minutes and Dues payment records
<b>Workers' compensation records</b>	Retain 12 years after injury (filing), death, or last compensation payment

<b>Worship Committee minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Yearbooks – denominational</b>	Retain as needed; archives maintains a permanent set
<b>Young Ladies’ Society minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Young Men’s Society minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Young People’s Society minutes</b>	See Minutes
<b>Youth Society records</b>	See Minutes and Dues payment records