

THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA GUIDE TO ARCHIVING PRESBYTERY RECORDS

Prepared by the United Church of Canada Archives Network, 2018

BACKGROUND

As The United Church of Canada moves to a three-court structure, presbyteries will no longer exist as a church court as of January 2019. In preparation for the dissolution of presbyteries, it is important for current presbytery staff and/or members to begin preparing their records to be transferred to the appropriate Conference Archives for long-term preservation.

A presbytery is responsible for the records that it creates, receives, and/or maintains in the course of its regular operation. Specifically, section A.5.3 of *The Manual, 2016*, states that presbytery is responsible for “keeping the records safe, secure, and under their control until the records are transferred to the appropriate archives.”

Presbyteries often do not have a physical location from which to operate as would a pastoral charge or a Conference. Therefore, the records of presbytery may be held by various members of the executive, and records may travel between presbytery meetings in various locations and/or stored in the homes of presbytery members (or at their church offices, if they are members of the order of ministry). Because of this, presbytery members may be unsure of what records are situated where, so it is essential that time is given to locate and gather the records of presbytery and to prepare them for transfer to the Conference Archives.

It is essential that members of presbytery know that the records of a presbytery belong to The United Church of Canada. Ministers, officials, or other individuals may not alienate them or otherwise assume personal control of them (section A.5.4 *The Manual, 2016*). They may also not destroy presbytery records without the permission of the presbytery, as documented in the minutes of a presbytery meeting.

WHERE TO START

The following steps are recommended in preparing presbytery records to be transferred to the appropriate Conference Archives:

1. Ask your Conference Archives for a listing of presbytery holdings already deposited in the archives.
2. Determine where non-archived records are currently held, and gather them in a central location to review and prepare for transfer.
3. Determine what records are needed for ongoing presbytery business until the dissolution of presbyteries, and what records may need to be transferred to the new regional councils. (See any recommendations from The United Church of Canada Transition Team.)
4. Consult the recommended list of records to be archived, and contact your Conference Archivist if you have any questions (see below).
5. Remove and destroy any duplicates, according to best practices.
6. Ensure that all file folders or binders are labelled correctly.
7. Prepare a listing (by box) of the records to be transferred to the Archives. Records may be arranged by grouping (i.e., minutes, pastoral charge files, financial records, etc.).
8. Once lists are completed, get your presbytery, or the executive, to approve the transfer of the records.

9. Consult your Conference Archives to arrange transfer of records.

WHAT SHOULD BE TRANSFERRED TO THE ARCHIVES?

The following chart has been developed to assist members of presbytery in identifying which records are archival and which are not. The chart also provides direction on how long to retain non-archival records before they can be destroyed. If there are any documents or items that are not on this list and you are not sure what to do with them, please contact your Conference Archivist.

TYPES OF RECORDS	RETENTION PERIOD	COMMENTS
[OPERATIONAL]		
Annual reports	Archival	
Ballots	Retain until results are confirmed, then destroy	
Bylaws, constitution	Archival	Retain all historical versions
Organizational charts	Archival	Retain all historical versions
Correspondence and memoranda: <u>General</u> (for routine matters, e.g., requests for basic information, referrals to other sources)	Destroy after 3 years	
Correspondence and memoranda: <u>Substantive</u> (dealing with legal or other important matters, potential value for historical research on policy or issues, etc.)	Archival	
Legal documents (e.g. deeds, titles, mortgages, bills of sale)	Archival	
Minutes and proceedings of presbytery meetings and presbytery executive meetings	Archival	Includes appendices and attachment to the minutes (i.e. correspondence, reports, etc. tabled at the presbytery minutes); <i>ensure</i> the minutes have been <u>signed</u> and <u>reviewed</u>
Planning documents (e.g. goals, objectives, priorities)	Archival	
Policy statements and procedure manuals	Archival	
Visitation reports (often kept as case files for each pastoral charge)	Archival	

TYPES OF RECORDS	RETENTION PERIOD	COMMENTS
[OPERATIONAL cont.]		
Annual reports submitted by pastoral charges within the bounds of presbytery	Archival	Please consult Conference Archivist to see what reports to send.
Presbytery standing committee and ad hoc committee records (minutes, reports, substantive correspondence, reports, etc.).	Archival	
Case files or correspondence files (usually these are substantive correspondence and subject files pertaining to each pastoral charge within the presbytery)	Archival	
Reports generated by or for presbytery; or related to the work of the presbytery	Archival	

[FINANCE]		
Audited financial statement	Archival	Includes external audit and federal
Bank statements, pass books, reconciliation and cancelled cheques	Destroy after 7 years	This is a requirement of the Income Tax Act
Budget planning documents	Retain until budget approved, then destroy	
Budget, approved	Archival	
Cash receipts	Destroy after 7 years	
Deposit books/slips	Destroy after 7 years	
Donor receipts	Destroy after 7 years	
General ledger	Archival	
Journals and subsidiary ledgers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accounts payable • Accounts receivable • Cash receipts • Miscellaneous and other • Payroll 	Destroy after 7 years	

TYPES OF RECORDS	RETENTION PERIOD	COMMENTS
[FINANCE cont.]		
Tax returns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • charitable • GST 	Destroy after 7 years	
Tax bills: property municipal	Destroy after 7 years	

[PROPERTY]		
Inspection reports	Retain until next inspection	
Insurance policies: liability	Archival	
Insurance policies: other (including property, travel, accident)	Destroy after 7 years	
Invoices: construction	Archival	
Invoices: other capital	Destroy after 5 years	
Invoices: operating	Destroy after 5 years	
Property records: deeds, titles, leases	Archival	
Property records (usually maintained as case files for each pastoral charge). May also include duplicate certificates of title, architectural drawings, maps, plans, specifications	Archival	
Utility contracts	Destroy after 7 years	

[MEMBERSHIP]		
Rolls of presbytery	Archival	Retain all historical versions
Directories (i.e. members, staff)	While active	
Mailing lists	While current	
Registers: baptism, marriage, burial	Archival	

TYPES OF RECORDS	RETENTION PERIOD	COMMENTS
[PERSONNEL]		
<i>Please consult the Conference Personnel Minister or the Conference Archivist for guidance.</i>		

[OTHER]		
<p>Records created or maintained by any presbytery-related or sponsored entities, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension councils • Camps • Sunday school associations or conventions • Ministerial associations (sometimes ecumenical) • Hospital chaplaincies • Youth groups • Women's groups (including presbyterials) • Men's group • Couples clubs • Lodges or seniors' homes • Social service centres 	Archival	Please consult Conference Archivist for advice with such records. Incorporated ministries of the United Church should retain their official records unless there is an agreement with the appropriate Conference Archives.
Candidates, ordinations, inductions	Archival	
Biographical material of key members and clergy who have served the presbytery	Archival	
Newsletters	Archival	
Bulletins, orders of service, programs	Archival	Some Archives retain only select samples, e.g., special events/overview of year.
Historical data and histories of the presbytery or its pastoral charges (published and unpublished)	Archival	
Celebrations (anniversaries, others)	Archival	

TYPES OF RECORDS	RETENTION PERIOD	COMMENTS
[OTHER cont.]		
Audio or video recordings created or sponsored by the presbytery (on film, videotape, audiotape, DVD, etc.)	Archival	Including recordings of presbytery events or activities; key speakers, theme or title of event, and date of event described
Oral history recordings or transcripts (tapes, CDs, audio files, etc.)	Archival	
Press releases issued by presbytery	Archival	
Speeches (presbytery officers, clergy, guests)	Archival	Describe events, dates, people, places
Photographs (including prints, negatives, and slides)	Archival	Describe events, dates, people, places
Scrapbooks	Archival	Describe events, dates, people, places
Books and publications	Archival	Only items published by presbytery

ACTIVE FINANCIAL RECORDS

According to the Income Tax Act, certain records must be retained for a specified period of time (usually seven years). With the dissolution of presbyteries, these records should be transferred to the General Council Office in Toronto for the remaining retention. Please consult resources from the Transition Team.

ARTIFACTS/GIFTED OBJECTS

Presbyteries may have been gifted artifacts—or three-dimensional objects—of historical significance or in commemoration/memory of members or events, such as quilts, banners, plaques, etc. Conference Archives are not equipped to acquire such items due to space and lack of expertise in artifacts. It is recommended that presbyteries find new homes for such items, i.e., community museums or historical societies, or even a congregation that may have some.

RESTRICTED MATERIAL

From time to time, some committees such as the Ministry and Personnel Committee, Pastoral Relations Committee, etc., may deal with sensitive incidents or issues that may require closure of the records for certain periods of time. It is highly recommended that these committees maintain as a separate case file the records arising from any sensitive incident or issue. The standard timing rule in the Conference Archives for closing these records is 75 years from the latest document dated in the file. By keeping the routine record separate from the incident record, it will allow the routine record to continue to be open and accessible in the Conference Archives and only the incident records will be subject to closure.

ELECTRONIC RECORDS

In some cases, the records identified as “archival” will have been created electronically, as **word-processed document files, digital photos, audio or video files, or databases**. At the present time, the Conference Archives cannot accept digital versions of presbytery minutes, reports, correspondence, membership, financial, property, legal, or other official records. *Please ensure that all necessary documents have been printed and filed, in accordance with United Church guidelines.*

Certain digital records—including **photos, audio and video files**—present special challenges for archives, whether they are transferred in their original electronic form, printed on paper, or carried on disks, cassette tapes, or other containers. If you have records like these, please consult with the Conference Archivist at the earliest opportunity to ensure the appropriate preservation measures can be taken.

Please also ensure that the Conference has up-to-date addresses for any **websites** (or other **social media** involvement) run by your presbytery. Preservation of online content is being coordinated through the United Church Archives Network, based on the information provided by Conferences and Archivists.

BEST PRACTICES FOR RECORD DESTRUCTION

Not all records are archival and do not need to be kept permanently. Certain records can be destroyed after holding them for a particular time period, as indicated in the recommended retention period shown above. In addition, drafts and duplicate copies of documents do not need to be kept.

Once these records no longer need to be retained, they must be carefully disposed of under controlled conditions. Any paper records containing personal or confidential information (including duplicate copies) should be shredded or destroyed by other permanent means. Such records should not be simply recycled, as the information could be identified and distributed to other places and/or sources. Electronic records designated for destruction should also be deleted from all computer drives and other portable devices.