

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES
FOR PARISH
SACRAMENTAL REGISTERS

DIOCESE OF SAN BERNARDINO
2012

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1. Ownership and Responsibility

1.0 Copyright:

Ownership of all Roman Catholic Sacramental Records resides within the jurisdiction of the Roman Catholic Bishop of San Bernardino.

1.1 Responsibility

The creation, preservation and use of sacramental records are the responsibility of the pastor, parochial administrator, pastoral coordinator, or delegated person. (Canon 535.1)

The Pastor or Pastoral Coordinator has the ultimate duty to assure that sacramental and death registers are maintained as provided herein. (Canon 535.1)

Any legal issues arising with the sacramental entries should be reviewed by the Vicar General or Chancellor of the Diocese.

1. Procedures for the Creation of Sacramental Registers and their Entries/Notations

2.1 Sacramental Registers

Each parish is required to keep the following sacramental Registers: Baptism (Canon 877. 1), First Communion, Confirmation (Canons 895 and 896), Marriage (Canon 1121. 1), Anointing of the Sick, as well as Death (Canon 1182). The registers are to be clearly marked with the name of the parish, city, starting and ending dates. Computer programs may supplement the registers for providing a back up copy; they do not replace the registers themselves. The parish needs to use a Parish Data Management System (i.e, Parish Soft) to document current sacramental records for the purpose of having a back-up record to their sacramental registers.

First Penance/Reconciliation/Confession is not to be recorded. (Canon 983.1)

The blank, unnumbered (101) pages at the end of books or the last pages of each section should not be used for standard entries. These pages are for corrections, additions, and reference notations. Do not tape, glue, or staple extra items in the register. Store extra items or loose sheets in a separate supportive document file if necessary. It is not necessary to keep the announcements and notifications of sacramental receptions that are sent to the parish of baptism.

Retire the books as they become fragile and worn. Close combined registers when three or four sections are full; a combined register has pages for more than one sacrament. All registers are to be kept at the parish permanently, unless requested by the Diocesan Archivist.

2.1.1 Sacraments celebrated outside of the Church

Sacraments celebrated in special situations such as in a hospital, prison or college campus are to be recorded at the geographic parish in whose boundaries the institution resides.

2.2 Register Storage

Sacramental Registers should be kept in a secure place. They should be stored and handled in an environment that ensures their preservation (Canon 535.4). A fire-proof, locked file cabinet or a safe is sufficient to prevent unauthorized access and damage to the sacramental records. Registers should be kept in a cool, dry environment away from direct sunlight. A parish office that is air-conditioned with average humidity will work well.

2.3 Bindings, Paper and Ink

The registers are permanent historical records. The binding should be high quality; leather bound is best. The registers should be bound with stitched-binding not simple glue binding. The paper should be acid-free, non-yellowing.

It is best to use permanent black ink in the registers. Do not use colored inks; they fade over time. Do not use pencils, felt-tip and roller-ball pens; the ink spreads and bleeds over time.

It is permissible to re-bind old and worn sacramental registers.

2.4 Accuracy and Legibility

The registers are kept for future reference as legal proof (canonical and civil) of the reception of church sacraments, age, and family association. 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 (Canon 535.1). Neither the pastor nor the priest or deacon celebrating must sign each entry, although that would be ideal. The pastor or pastoral coordinator can delegate a staff person to write legibly the name of the appropriate minister in the register.

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 preserved and whether there have been any alterations. Any corrections or deletions that need to be made due to factual errors should be made by adding a notation. The notation should be made based on some written proof; this proof should be identified in the notation. Do not erase, cross out, or white out. Changes made in any register should be accompanied by the initials of the person inserting the change.

2.6 Church Seal

In preparing a sacramental certificate, the parish seal is to be attached to the certificate in order to validate its authenticity. On occasion, the parish seal is not readable when a certificate is faxed. The use of an ink-stamped church seal is acceptable when there is a need to fax a certificate. The ink-stamped seal is to closely resemble the official church seal. When emailing a scanned certificate, a computer generated parish seal can be used.

2.7 Sacramental Paperwork

The forms used by the parish sacramental formation programs are no longer needed once the sacrament is received and the proper entry is made in the sacramental registers. The forms may be kept while the person is participating in parish formation programs for identification. The exception is with the Sacrament of Matrimony. The proper forms and required church paperwork, which includes marriage preparation, is to be kept in a Marriage File at the parish where the Marriage was performed. This is a permanent file.

2.8 Sacramental Certificates

Every sacramental certificate is an authenticated transcript of the original record from the register, because it is signed and sealed with the parish seal. Every certificate is to be accurate and legible; typewritten is preferred. The certificate is to be complete; all notations are to be included except in cases of adoption (see Section 3.5 below). The absence of information to fit an item on the printed form is to be indicated by the word “None”, rather than leave the space blank. Computer generated certificates are acceptable. These should be professional in appearance.

2.9 Cultural Issues

There may be requests concerning sacramental records that derive from the cultural values of a particular ethnic community. The parish should seek an accommodation when possible. See Section 3.7 for recommendations with Baptismal records and Section 4.4 for recommendations with First Communion records.

3.0 Baptismal Registers

3.1 Baptismal Records, General

The following information for each baptism shall be recorded without delay: the names of those baptized, their date and place of birth, their date and place of baptism, parents, including the mother’s maiden name, sponsors, and the minister of the sacrament (Canon 877.1) Most of the

time this information will match that on the civil birth certificate. Each parish is to develop a paperwork system that will allow for accuracy that the person has received their baptism and the information is ready to be placed in the register. It is recommended that there be a primary and secondary recorder for the baptism register in order to ensure accuracy and avoid error.

3.1.1 Changes to Baptismal Records

A person's name is never deleted from a baptismal register for any reason. This includes requests due to a family situation or a desire to leave the Catholic Church.

3.1.2 Proof of Baptism

Canons 875 and 876 remind us that the proof of the reception of Baptism can be through documentation (i.e. certificate) or the written word of a witness who was present at the Baptism. Secondary evidence such as photos/video, parish bulletin/newsletters and family correspondence can also contribute to the proof. From such documentation an entry in a Baptismal register can be made.

3.2 Baptismal Records, Routine Notations

The baptismal register serves as the master record for a person's membership in the Church (Canon 535.2). Notations concerning other sacraments received later in life are to be entered there: First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage (s) including convalidations, and Holy Orders. Also to be included are perpetual vows in a religious institute and a change of rite.

Notations of annulment and prohibitions on future marriage, laicization and dispensation from vows shall also be entered when requested officially by the appropriate church authorities.

It is the responsibility of the parish where later sacraments are celebrated to notify the parish of Baptism for proper notification.

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 earlier date and place of baptism of the party; along with the other requirements listed in Section 3.1. Once the candidate receives the sacraments of initiation (Holy Communion and Confirmation), their name shall be recorded in the baptismal register as outlined in Section 3.1., and entries shall be recorded in the Confirmation and First Communion registers. It is not necessary to contact the church of baptism in the former denomination about the profession of faith.

3.4 Baptismal Records, Unmarried Mother

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 certificate) 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” (Canon 877.2). It is not permitted to make an annotation which says “illegitimate.”

3.5 Baptismal Records, Cases of Adopted Children (Canon 877. 3)

3.5.1 For children baptized after their adoption is finalized, the following information shall be entered in the register:

- a. the Christian name of the child as designated by the adoptive parents
- b. the name of the adoptive parents
- c. the date and place of birth
- d. the names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parents
- e. the place and date of the baptism
- f. the name of the minister performing the baptism
- g. the fact of adoption but not the names of the natural parents

A baptismal certificate issued by the parish for adopted children will be no different from other baptismal certificates. No mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate.

- 3.5.2 For 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 and with due regard for the civil law of the jurisdiction:
- a. parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parents
 - b. the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added
 - c. the child's former surname shall also be parenthesized and the new surname added
 - d. a notation shall be made that the child was legally adopted.

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, and the name of the minister who conferred the sacrament. The name(s) of the sponsor(s) shall not be given, and no mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate. (On November 18, 1998, the Latin Rite members of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops approved complementary Legislation for Canon 877.3 of the Code of Canon Law for the Latin Rite dioceses of the United States.)

- 3.5.3 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 parents' parish, citing the date and location of the original baptismal record, and listing only the name of the adoptive parents, and the date and place of birth.

- 3.5.4 Parish personnel having access to the parish register 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

Baptismal records are never to be changed!

However, sometimes corrections are necessary. Moreover, 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 should never be glued, stapled, paper clipped or stored in the actual register. After the appropriate notations are made, these items should be kept in a separate file corresponding to each register and page number. The file should be referred to in the notation. The file should be kept permanently.

3.7 Baptismal Record, Cultural Concerns

The parish should accommodate specific requests from a cultural perspective when possible. When the family requests multiple sponsors for a Baptism, the family will select the two godparents to be recorded in the Baptismal register.

3.8 Baptismal Record, Outside Clergy

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 is to 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.

3.9 Baptismal Record, Emergencies

If a Baptism is performed in a hospital because of an emergency, the necessary information is to be forwarded as soon as possible to the proper parish (that is, parish in whose territory the hospital is located) by the priest, hospital chaplain or pastoral care staff who baptized.

3.10 Baptismal Record, Special Circumstances

When sacraments are administered in places other than a parish church building, it is important that the record of those sacraments not be lost

and irretrievable at a future date; this would include prisons and college campuses. Baptisms are to be recorded at the parish whose territory encompasses the location at which the sacrament was celebrated.

3.11 Missing Entry Baptismal Registers

When a baptism entry (or, indeed, any sacramental entry) cannot be found upon request, a new entry can be created in the following circumstances:

- a. If a person presents a valid Baptism certificate that has the original signature and seal of the parish. The entry is posted to the year in which the baptism took place as a notation; most likely there will not be room for a regular entry. Note that this is a delayed entry. Copy the certificate and keep it in the support file to the baptismal register.
- b. When there is no certificate, the person needs to present the declaration of a witness to the Baptism. The testimonial statement should include as much information about the baptism as possible. Consider any photos, videos, or written documents as supportive material. Make this delayed entry to the year of the Baptism as a notation in the open pages at the back of the register. The statement of the witness should be kept in the support file for the register.

4. First Communion Registers

4.1 First Communion Records, General

Each parish will maintain a First Communion register. This register will include the name of the First Communicant, the date of reception, the date and place of baptism, the names of the parents, and the name of the priest.

4.2 First Communion Records, Other Parish

If the First Communion is received in a parish other than the parish of Baptism, a notification of this sacrament is to be sent to the parish of Baptism so that a notation may be made in the Baptismal register.

4.3 First Communion Records, Special Situation

When a First Communion is celebrated in a hospital, prison, college campus, or other setting, the sacramental information is to be sent to the parish office to be recorded in the parish's First Communion register.

4.4 First Communion Records, Sponsor

Even though some cultures may use sponsors for First Communion, the rite of the Church has no provision for their liturgical participation, and hence, their names are not be recorded in the sacramental register.

5. Confirmation Registers

5.1 Confirmation Records, General

Each parish will maintain a Confirmation register. This register will include the name of the Confirmandi, the Confirmation name, date of reception, date and place of baptism, parents' names, sponsor's name, and the name of the celebrant.

5.2 Confirmation Records, Other Parish

If the Confirmation is received in a parish other than the parish of Baptism, a notification of this sacrament is to be sent to the parish of Baptism so that a notation may be made in the Baptismal Register.

5.3 Group Confirmations

If several parishes have been grouped for a single Confirmation liturgy the recording of the Confirmation will be in two locations. The host parish will record the Confirmation for their own Confirmandi, along with the names of the visiting parishes. Secondly, the visiting parishes will record the Confirmation for their respective Confirmandi, noting the location of the host parish. Each parish is responsible for notifying the

parish of Baptism for their own Confirmandi, so a notation may be made in the Baptismal Register.

6. Marriage Registers

6.1 Marriage Records, General

Each parish is to maintain a marriage register; this includes marriages convalidated in the external forum. This register will include: names of the spouses, place and date of the marriage, the priest or deacon who assisted and the witnesses, and any additional pertinent notations. (Canon 1121.1)

6.2 Marriage Records, Notations

The following notations are to be entered in the marriage record:

- a. dispensation received from impediments
- b. dispensation from canonical form
- c. dispensation from place
- d. delegation given to assist at marriage
- e. decree of nullity, if any, along with restrictions of future marriages

Whenever a dispensation of any kind is involved, the name of the Diocese which issued the dispensation is to be noted in the Marriage register along with the standard information. These notations should be listed as:

- Dispensation: disparity of cult (unbaptized party)
- Dispensation: mixed marriage
- Dispensation: vow of celibacy
- Dispensation: age
- Dispensation: consanguinity
- Dispensation: form and/or place

In the case of a wedding celebrated with a dispensation from canonical form and/or dispensation from place, it is the duty of the Catholic party to give the information on the dispensation along with the information about the person who actually assisted and the location of the wedding to the Pastor or Pastoral Coordinator of the parish from which the dispensation was requested. This is usually the home parish of the Catholic party. This

data is then entered into the Marriage register of that same parish. In turn, that parish is to inform the parish of baptism of the Catholic party of this same information, whereupon the information is to be entered into the baptismal record.

6.3 Marriage Records, Wedding in a Hospital

If a marriage is celebrated in a hospital, the necessary register information is to be forwarded by the delegated cleric to the proper territorial parish as soon as possible. This data is then entered into the marriage register of that same parish. In turn, that parish is to inform the parish of baptism of any Catholic party of this same information, whereupon the information is to be entered into the baptismal record.

7. Anointing of the Sick Register

7.1 Anointing of the Sick Records, General

It is recommended that each parish maintain a register to keep a record of sick calls where the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick was performed. The register would include: date of the sacrament, location where the anointing took place, name of the person anointed and the name of the priest.

Group or communal anointings which take place in a parish should be mentioned in this register; not the specific names, but a notation the Sacrament did take place and possibly an estimate of the number of people anointed. Priest hospital chaplains are to maintain a register of the anointing they do in the hospital; therefore, these anointings are not recorded in the parish in whose territory the hospital is located.

8. Death Registers

8.1 Death Records, General

Each parish is to maintain a register that records the death of its parishioners. The register is to include the name of the deceased, age, date of death, family information, priest who performed the burial, and the date and place of burial in the death register.

8.2 Death Records, Special Circumstances

When a funeral is celebrated in places other than a parish church building, it is still important that the death information be properly recorded. All Catholic funerals, even if celebrated outside the church building, are to be recorded in the parish death register. Examples would be funeral services at a funeral home or grave side at the cemetery.

If a priest or deacon is called upon to preside at a non-Catholic burial an entry may be made in the parish's death register by the priest or deacon, together with a notation concerning the religion of the deceased and the liturgies provided.

9. Access to Sacramental Records

9.1 Access Policy

Sacramental and death records are both private and public in nature. The records are private in that they are intended to document an individual's status within the Church. The records are public in that they will stand in civil law as valid and authentic evidence when an appropriate civil record does not exist. The records are not public in the sense that they are open to immediate examination by anyone for any reason. Restrictions on access may be legitimately imposed without violating the essential private and public nature of the records.

For general research purposes, only sacramental and death records older than 75 years may be accessed. If the parish is approached by a professional researcher, professional genealogist or family member doing genealogy who wishes to research the sacramental records, permission must be obtained from the Diocesan Archivist or Chancellor.

For a regular request for sacramental information, the following access is permitted:

- 9.1.1 the party named in the sacramental records as having received the sacrament
- 9.1.2 the immediate family whose family member named in the death register as having been interred
- 9.1.3 the parent or legal guardian of a minor child
- 9.1.4 diocesan officials involved in a canonical investigation
- 9.1.5 an individual with a valid power of attorney for the person who received the sacrament

9.2 Access Procedures

- 9.2.1 If the person requesting the sacramental information is not known to the parish staff, proof of identification is required. This identification should be accompanied with a permission to release information from the person who received the sacrament.
- 9.2.2 Requests made by government agencies should be in writing, accompanied by the permission to release information from the person who received the sacrament
- 9.2.3 Requests from the Court or subpoenas for sacramental information are to be reviewed by the Diocesan Legal Counsel and the Office of Canonical Services.

9.3 Parish Fees

No fees should be charged for the research and providing information on sacramental records.

9.4 Sacramental Certificates

Sacramental certificate forms purchased from a Catholic publishing house can be used. Certificates generated from a computer software program can also be used. All certificates should be professional in appearance and with proper representation of the Catholic Church. The parish name and city are to be included on all certificates. The parish

seal is to be embossed on all hard copy certificates. A rubber ink stamp of the parish seal may be used for certificates that need to be faxed.

Baptismal certificates must include information on any subsequent sacraments or profession of perpetual vows in a religious community which are noted in the baptismal register. On preprinted forms the place for these notations will be on the reverse side of the certificate.

All certificates must be signed by the current Pastor, Parochial Vicar or Pastoral Coordinator of the parish issuing the certificates.

9.4.1 Absence of a Certificate

Canons 875 and 876 remind us that the proof of the reception of Baptism (and by reasonable extension, of any sacrament) can be through documentation (i.e. certificate) or the written word of a witness who was present at the Baptism. Secondary evidence such as photos/video, parish bulletin/newsletter, and family correspondence can also contribute to the proof.

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Approval:

These policies and procedures were approved by Bishop Gerald R. Barnes, Bishop of San Bernardino on October 11, 2012. This document was updated on March 1, 2019.