



# ARCHDIOCESE OF PORTLAND IN OREGON

## INTRODUCTION

### Sacramental Registers

Each parish is to possess a set of parish books including baptismal, marriage, and death registers (c. 535§1) as well as other registers prescribed by archdiocesan legislation. In addition to those registers listed in canon 535§1, parishes will ordinarily maintain a record book for Confirmation. First Communion registers are optional. The pastor\* is responsible for making certain that these registers are accurately kept and carefully preserved.

\*Wherever the term "pastor" is used, read also parish administrator.

*Sacramental records may be duplicated on computers. However, a complete record must be maintained in the registers, and the registers themselves are never to be destroyed or discarded. The registers are considered the only authentic copy of sacramental records.*

Parish sacramental registers are a valuable asset for individuals, the parish and the Church. They are, therefore, to be attended to carefully and preserved diligently. Parish registers are the property of the parish. Ownership and responsibility for parish records is transferred to the archdiocesan archives when a record book is filled and a suitable time has passed.

Care must be taken to protect people's privacy. Although sacramental registers contain information about public events and other facts readily known to any interested party, they also contain information which is personal and confidential.

Parish record books are not to leave the parish premises and are to be maintained in a secure location, the registers must be kept in a protected place such as a safe, vault, or locked and fireproof filing cabinet. An inventory of the registers is to be created as well (c. 535§4).

### *Register Format*

Each parish register should be inscribed with the name of the parish, an indication of which sacrament is being recorded, and the dates of beginning and ending entries. All registers should also include an index of names.

Certain entries or notations to sacramental records require legal documents which are to be permanently kept. These documents should be kept in separate files in the parish archives. The files are to correspond to the appropriate register, and include the name of the individual(s) and

page and register entry number on which to find the record. The file should be referred to in the notations of the register.

Binding — If the original binding and/or cover of a register is in disrepair, the archdiocese should be consulted regarding the recommended restoration of the binding. The binding should NOT be repaired using any materials that might be non-archival, even so-called ‘mending tape’, if it is not archival quality.

### *Changes to the Registers*

#### Corrections

If it becomes apparent that a spelling error had been made in the record in the past, a single or double line is to be drawn through the incorrect word and printed correctly in the remarks column. A notation is to be made along with the date and signature of the person authorizing the change.

Changes of a substantial nature are to be made only with authenticating evidence (e.g., civil records). A single black line is to be drawn through the incorrect entry. A new entry is to be created, and the new entry number placed in the index. Notations are to be made along with the date and signature of the person authorizing the emendation. Copies of the documents giving evidence to the change are to be kept in the permanent files of the parish archives and cross-references placed in the notations of the entry and on the file.

#### Recreating a Record

If an individual has received a sacrament but the event was not recorded, the record can be recreated. If an individual has witnessed the baptism, they are to complete an affidavit in the presence of a priest (contact the Chancellor’s Office for an affidavit). An affidavit or letter from the presiding priest would also be acceptable. Photographs may be used as valid evidence when other evidence is insufficient. An exception to these requirements is made in the case of the baptism of an adult (see Canon 876). In this case, the oath of the individual or declaration of a single witness is all the evidence that is needed. The entry is to be created and indexed. The documentation is to be filed.

Notations added to an entry after the fact (e.g., notice of annulment) are to be made along with the date and signature of the person authorizing the newly created entry. Supporting documentation is to be kept in the permanent files of the parish archives and cross-references placed in the notations of the entry and on the file.

### *Certificates*

Persons have the right to copies of public documents that pertain to their church status, including their sacramental records (c. 487§2). The Church also recognizes a person's right to their reputation and privacy (c. 220). Therefore, parish personnel must exercise care with regard to providing sacramental documents and allowing access to church records. Church records are not

"public" in the sense of "open records" for review at the request of individuals. Use of records for personal or genealogical research needs to be monitored. Individuals seeking access to records for such research should be referred to the Archdiocesan archives. In most cases, microfilm of older records is stored in the archives. Use of microfilm records helps to preserve the delicate older books while still serving researchers' needs. The diocesan archives maintain rules for access and will handle the written requests of researchers in a timely fashion.

It is recommended that identification be requested in order to release a record and that requests be made in writing, and signed by the individual requesting the record. Authorized recipients of a sacramental record include the party or parties named in the record as having received the sacrament; Roman Catholic clergy or his delegate involved in canonical procedures; the parents of the subject, if the subject is a minor; and government agencies (such as the Social Security Administration) who present a signed release from the person whose record is requested

An individual seeking his or her own sacramental record, or a parent seeking one for a minor, should be issued a certificate by the parish verifying the factual data contained in the register. (See below for specific directions for various sacraments.) Such certificates are to be issued promptly and without charge. Requests for sacramental information made by another parish or church entity (e.g., a tribunal) are likewise to be honored promptly and without fee. At times, an individual may request a record of another party for a church process (e.g., to process a lack of canonical form case). The record is issued directly to the chancery or tribunal processing the case. Any other requests for records, e.g., in civil litigation, are to be referred to the Chancellor. Any subpoena or court order for records is to be accepted by the pastor but no records are to be issued to the server. In such cases, the matter is referred to the Chancery Office.

## **Baptismal Registers**

The baptismal register is an historical document that records the facts as they are known and understood at the time of the baptism. When subsequent, additional notations are made or other alterations are needed, nothing already written in the register may be obliterated in any way by anyone for any reason. Only additions can be made, not changes that erase something even erroneously recorded.

A state birth certificate is to be used as the supporting documentation for the baptismal register entry. If this is not possible to obtain, the hospital record can be used to verify the date of birth and parents names. Entering information into the baptismal register based on verbal statements alone can be problematic, and may result in the recording of inaccurate information and the creation of inauthentic records.

The baptismal register is the primary record for recording a person's status within the church (c 535§ 2). In general, the baptismal register is to include:

1. Full name at birth
2. Date and place of birth
3. Minister of the sacrament
4. Full names of the parents (including mother's maiden name)
5. Names of the sponsors or witnesses

## 6. Date of the conferred baptism (c. 877).

Notations to be entered in the baptismal register include confirmation, marriage, and holy orders. Even if these sacraments are conferred at the same parish, the notations are to be recorded in the baptismal register. Additional notations to the register include those regarding religious profession, conditional baptisms, rites supplied, annulments, laicization, change of rite, and dispensations from vows.

Entries are to be made accurately, promptly, and legibly in black ink and *printed* except for any signatures. Original entries are never deleted.

### A. Personal Names (recipient of sacrament, parents, godparents, sponsors, proxies, etc.)

If there is currently no standard parish practice regarding the entry of personal names in the parish sacramental records, then a standard should be adopted, *i.e.*, a full & complete legal name should be used. Example: Smith, John A. (surname, Christian name, middle name or initial).

### B. Date(-s)

If there is currently no standard parish practice regarding the entry of dates in the parish sacramental records, then a standard should be adopted *i.e.*, A full & complete archival date should be used. Examples: May 12, 2004 or 05/12/04.

### C. Minister

The full & complete preferred legal signature of the priest should be recorded in ink as an original cursive signature by the priest himself. A rubber-stamp or other facsimile signature may not be substituted for the authentic, legal signature of the priest.

Even though the same priest might serve as minister for several sacraments in a row, ditto marks ("") should never be used in place of his full legal name.

### D. Sponsors

Church law (c. 873) stipulates one and no more than two sponsors (one female and one male) of baptism. Church law (c. 874§2) allows a baptized person, who is not a member of the Catholic Church, to serve as "a Christian witness." The designation "CW" might be useful for clarity. Church law (*Ecumenical Directory #98b*) holds that a baptized Eastern Orthodox is properly a godparent and not a Christian witness.

In some cases, it is customary for the baptized to have multiple sponsors. When this occurs, the original certificate issued may list all sponsors, but the register itself is to list only two.

When a godparent or sponsor appoints a proxy to participate in the rite of baptism, both names should be entered in the register with "Proxy" written after that person's name.

In cases when the parents of the baptized request new "godparents" some time after the baptism has taken place, it should be explained that the parents may choose anyone to assist with the faith development of an individual, but that the register may not be changed.

#### E. Additional Data Columns

Any additional notes should be as inclusive as possible in the space provided. Example: If a notation of subsequent Catholic marriage is to be made in a Baptismal register, the "Place" line should include both the name of the church (the canonical place) & the name of the city and state (the civil place).

#### *Recreating a Baptismal Record*

In some cases, even though a Baptism was validly celebrated, the record was not originally entered into the proper register. In such cases, the fact of the sacrament can be sworn to by affidavit. These affidavits can be obtained from the chancellor's office. The person attesting to the fact must have been present at the celebration of the sacrament (e.g., parents at the baptism) or been the recipient of the sacrament and beyond the age of reason (age 7 in most cases) at the time it was received (c. 876). When the pastor or his delegate receives this affidavit, the factual information can be entered into the proper register. The following notation is made: "Sworn to by affidavit of (name) on (date)."

Each register is to include a complete index arranged alphabetically by last name. The index may contain cross-references to other registers and other appropriate notations.

#### *Baptismal Certificates*

A certificate of baptism is an official document certifying what appears in the baptismal register, which is the only official record. The certificate only attests to the fact of baptism of a particular and unique person, not parentage or any other thing.

At a minimum on the certificate, there must be some version of the person's name, the date of baptism and some other facts that will certainly identify the person in a way that s/he cannot be confused with someone else.

Certificates are to be issued as soon as possible after the event is recorded in the register. A routine baptismal certificate is to include all information of a public nature, but may not include any confidential notations (such as references made to adoption or legitimacy). An official baptismal certificate is to be signed, dated, and sealed. A notation at the bottom of the certificate regarding the entry number of the record in the register is optional. The reverse of the baptismal certificate is to be completed as the notations indicate. If there are no notations, the reverse of the certificate is to be completed with the phrase "no notations."

### *Unwed parents*

The name of the mother is to be entered in the register if there is public proof of her maternity (e.g., the birth certificate) or if she states this in writing or before two witnesses (Canon 877). The name of the father is to be inserted only if there is public proof (e.g., the birth certificate) or by his own sworn declaration before the pastor and two witnesses. If no public proof is available, the name of the father or the mother is not recorded. The phrase "father unknown," or "mother unknown" is to be used. The certificate issued from this entry will record the appropriate phrase. The use of the phrase "illegitimate" is not permitted. Supporting documentation is to be kept in the permanent files of the parish archives and include the appropriate cross-references.

### *Profession of Faith*

A profession of faith is to be recorded in the "Reception into Full Communion" register or, until such time as the register is purchased, in a separate and clearly marked section at the back of the baptismal register. When confirmation has been received, the name of the person making the profession is to be recorded in the confirmation register, with a reference in the index to the page and entry number in the baptismal or Reception into Full Communion register. An optional certificate may be issued as soon as possible after the event. For information regarding registers relating to RCIA, see page 10, "Catechumenate."

Certificates are to be authenticated by signature and seal. They should be accurate, legible, and complete. Except in cases of adoption as noted below, all notations are to be included. If there is no record for a specific item, e.g., "Marriage" on the baptismal form, that absence should be noted by striking the line or inserting the note "none" or "none listed." The lines are not simply to be left blank.

### *Children Who Are Adopted*

In accord with the prescriptions of c. 877§3, the following norms of The National Conference of Catholic Bishops, having received the recognitio of the Holy See, are effective December 1, 2000. They supersede all things to the contrary.

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

- 1) the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s);
- 2) the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s);
- 3) the date and place of birth;
- 4) the names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parent(s);
- 5) the place and date of the baptism;
- 6) the name of the minister performing the baptism.; and

7) the fact of adoption but not the names of the natural parents.

Baptismal certificates 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.

In the Archdiocese of Portland, a copy of the legal adoption papers shall be kept within the baptismal register. In any case, no additions are to be made to the register unless they are transcribed from the legal adoption papers in hand.

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:

1. parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parents;
2. the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added;
3. the child's former surname shall also be parenthesized and the new surname added; and
4. 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.

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.

Parish personnel having access to parish registers have an obligation not to disclose to any person any information which would identify, or reveal, directly or indirectly, the fact that a person was adopted.

#### *Infant baptism - emergency situations*

In an emergency, such as danger of death, the infant is to be baptized at the *request of the parent(s)* without delay. The baptism is to be recorded in the baptismal registry of the parish within whose boundaries it was celebrated, providing the information noted above (with the exception of sponsors who are not normally present in an emergency situation) as well as the site of the baptism, e.g., the name of the hospital. When an emergency baptism has already been celebrated, the additional liturgical rites may be supplied at a later date after the emergency no longer exists. In such a case, the original baptismal information (date, place, and minister) is entered into the baptismal register of the parish where the rites are supplied with the additional notation "liturgical rites supplied" and the date these rites were performed.

#### *Conditional Baptism*

When conditional baptism is conferred, "Baptized conditionally" is to be written in the "Notations" column. Otherwise the entry is the same as for any other baptism. By virtue of c. 869§2, baptisms in other faiths are presumed valid until the contrary is demonstrated. Therefore, only after careful investigation and with a positive doubt remaining as to the fact of a baptism or its valid celebration, a person is conditionally baptized. This conditional baptism is done privately (i.e., no fanfare and only the essential participants). In such cases the date and place of baptism should be noted instead of the purported earlier baptism. A note as to its conditional celebration should be included.

### *Eastern Churches*

(*Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* c. 296§2.) In the baptismal register are also to be noted the enrollment of the baptized into a determined church *sui juris*; these notations are always to be noted on the certificate of baptism.

Ascription to an Eastern Catholic Church *sui iuris*, (e.g., Byzantine, Maronite) is determined by the rite of the father, not by the rite of the minister or parish of baptism, unless the person is 14 years of age or older, at which age the individual can choose his/her rite. Thus, when a Latin priest or deacon baptizes someone who by law is ascribed to an Eastern Catholic Church, a notation should be made in the "Notations" column. (c. 111)

### **RCIA**

With the promulgation of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults in the United States, the creation and maintenance of new registers relating to catechumens was required. These are the Register of Catechumens, the book of the Elect, and Reception into Full Communion.

- A. Register of Catechumens: This register is required for those individuals who have gone through the Rite of Acceptance. In general, the register of Catechumens is to include:
  1. Full name of the individual
  2. Name of the sponsor(s)
  3. Name of the minister of the Rite
  4. Date and place of the Rite.
- B. Book of the Elect: This register lists the names of the catechumens who have gone through the Rite of Election. The Archdiocesan Book of Elect is that register which is signed by the catechumens during the Rite of Election. This is considered the official register. However, in cases where parishes or faith communities do not send catechumens to the Archdiocesan Rite of Election, the parish is to create and maintain its own Book of Elect. In general, the Book of the Elect is to include:
  1. Full name of the individual
  2. Name of the sponsor(s)
  3. Name of the minister of the Rite
  4. Date and place of the Rite.

C. Reception into Full Communion: This register lists the names of those individuals who have been received into full communion of the Catholic Church. This register is to replace Profession of Faith entries in the baptism and/or confirmation registers.

The record is to include:

1. Full name of the individual
2. Date and place of the profession
3. Name of the sponsor(s)
4. Name of the minister
5. Date, place and minister of baptism.

Supporting documentation may include a copy of the individual's baptismal certificate.

Catechumens have a right to celebrate marriage according to the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church. Marriages involving catechumens are noted in the marriage register in the usual way. To ensure that proper permission and dispensations have been granted, the register should clearly indicate which parties are catechumens. For those whose names appear in the register of Catechumens a suitable cross-reference should be made.

#### *Formal Departure from the Catholic Church*

If an individual chooses to leave the Catholic Church by a formal act (c.1124), it must be done in writing and with the assistance of the Canonical Consultant's office. After supporting documentation has been forwarded to the parish by the Canonical Consultant, a notation is to be made in the baptismal register. The notation is to indicate that the individual has "formally withdrawn from the Catholic Church," the date of this event, and a reference to the file. Supporting documentation is to be placed in the permanent files of the parish archives. If a certificate is issued in the future, it is to include the notation of withdrawal.

### **Reconciliation Registers**

Canon Law does not require a record to be kept of the sacrament of reconciliation because, unlike first communion, this sacrament pertains exclusively to the internal forum, and therefore registers are never created.

### **First Communion Registers**

Although not required by universal law, many parishes also maintain records of first Communions. In such cases, the record should contain the names of the communicants, the parents as noted on the baptismal record, the date and place of baptism and the date of the reception of first Communion. It is not required to send notification of this sacrament to the place of baptism.

### **Confirmation Registers**

In general, the confirmation register is to include:

1. Full name of the confirmed
2. Confirmation name
3. Name of parents
4. Name of sponsor
5. Date and place of the event
6. Name of the minister (Canon 895).

A notation regarding the date and place of baptism may be placed in the remarks column. A copy of the baptismal certificate is required as supporting documentation. A confirmation certificate is to be issued as soon as possible after the event is recorded in the register. In cases of joint celebrations, each parish or faith community which sends candidates is responsible for the completion of its own register, which is to include the name of the parish in which the celebration took place. Notification of the reception of this sacrament is to be sent to the place of baptism. The date and place of the reception of this sacrament is to be noted in the baptismal register even if the sacrament took place in the same parish or faith community.

## **Marriage Registers**

Every marriage recognized by the Catholic Church, including the validation of a civil marriage, is to be recorded in the parish marriage register. The record should also include any notations, such as a dispensation/permission with the protocol number and diocese, fact of delegation for the officiant, decrees of nullity (annulment) or dissolution with the protocol number and diocese, and any restrictions on future marriage. The full prenuptial file is also to be maintained permanently in a safe and secured location. When a marriage is celebrated in a place other than a parish church or with a dispensation from form, specific filing and recording procedures are provided by the Chancery. Pastors are obliged to send written notification to the parish of baptism for Catholics whose marriage is entered in the parish marriage register.

In general, the marriage register is to include:

1. Full names of the spouses
2. Full names of witnesses
3. Name of officiant
4. Date and place of the marriage celebration (Canon 1121§1)
5. Date and place of baptism as it applies.

The prenuptial file or marriage data envelope created for the marriage is to be retained in the permanent files of the parish archives. The outside of the envelope may indicate the correlating register entry number. Supporting documentation in the prenuptial file or "marriage data envelope" includes:

1. Current (dated less than 6 months prior to request) baptismal certificates for baptized parties

2. Completed prenuptial forms, civil marriage license, civil marriage certificate (in cases of a radical sanation or a convalidation)
3. Death certificate (when necessary)
4. Documentation providing necessary dispensations, permissions, or delegations, Tribunal documents (when necessary)
5. A copy of a rescript (when necessary)
6. Any additional prenuptial forms or documentation required by the parish or faith community (e.g., engaged encounter certificate).

It is the responsibility of the officiant to promptly file any and all civil documents with the appropriate county. The sacramental certificate is to be issued as soon as possible after the marriage has been recorded, and notification of the marriage sent to the place of baptism of the Catholic party. The date and place of the reception of this sacrament is to be recorded in the baptismal register, even if the place of baptism is the same parish or faith community as the place of marriage.

#### *Notations*

There are several notations that may be used for the marriage record. The most common of these include: dispensations from impediments, permissions, decrees of dissolution or nullity, convalidations, and sanctions.

The recommended format for the notations is as follows:

1. Dispensation from disparity of cult granted by Father X, date.
2. Permission for a mixed marriage granted by Father X, date.
3. Dispensation from canonical form granted by Chancery, date.
4. Dissolution granted, date. Protocol number, diocese of tribunal.
5. Decree of nullity granted, date. Protocol number, diocese of tribunal.
6. Declaration of Freedom to marry granted, date. Protocol Number, diocese of tribunal.
7. Convalidation
8. Radical Sanation issued by Chancery, date.

Other: Marriages are to be recorded in the register of the parish at which the ceremony takes place. In cases where the ceremony occurs in the chapel of an institution, such as Christ the Teacher Chapel at the University of Portland, the marriage is to be recorded at the parish in which the institution resides. In cases where a wedding is celebrated with dispensation from canonical form, record of the marriage is found at the parish in which marriage preparation took place and which requested the dispensation, and at the Chancery of the diocese that granted the dispensation (Canon 1121§1). The prenuptial file or marriage data envelope is to be kept at the parish in which preparation took place. Notification of the marriage is to be sent to the place of baptism of the Catholic party by the party responsible for marriage preparation.

The index of the marriage register is to be arranged alphabetically by the last names of both spouses. The format is "male surname/female surname." The name to be used for the bride's surname is that which is found on her baptismal certificate or, if not baptized, her legal name.

## **Holy Orders Registers**

The Ordination register is kept and maintained by the Office of the Archbishop. A certificate is to be issued as soon as possible after the event is recorded, and notification of ordination is to be sent to the place of baptism. The date and place of the ordination and the name of the Ordinary conferring the sacrament are to be noted in the baptismal register.

## **Death Registers**

Each parish is to maintain a death register. It is arranged chronologically by date of death. The information recorded should include the name of the deceased, the date and place of death, the date and place of funeral services with the presiding priest or deacon, and the date and place of burial. All Catholic funerals at which a priest, deacon, or other authorized parish minister officiates, even if not celebrated in the parish church but rather at a funeral home or cemetery, are to be entered into the parish death register. Additional information can be added, such as the name of the funeral home, the next of kin, etc.