

MINISTRARE NON MINISTRARI

OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

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October 17, 2024

Memorial Feast of St. Ignatius of Antioch

Mrs. Terry Ginther, Chancellor
Chancery
Diocese of Trenton
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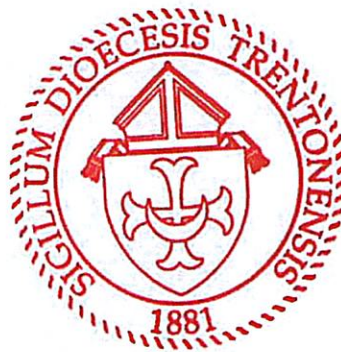
DECREE

As Bishop of the Diocese of Trenton, I write to officially approve as Diocesan policy the 2024 "Revised Guidelines for Sacramental Records and Parish Personnel," effective upon publication. Previous "Guidelines" are hereby abrogated.

Given at the Chancery of the Diocese of Trenton on October 17, 2024.

Respectfully yours in the Lord,

Most Reverend David M. O'Connell, C.M., J.C.D.
Bishop of Trenton





Diocese of Trenton

Guidelines on Sacramental Records and Reports for Parish Personnel

Office of the Chancellor - Revised October 2024

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I. REGISTER AND RECORDS CREATION AND MAINTENANCE

1. Each parish is required to keep the following sacramental registers: Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage and Death (*CIC*, c. 535). Besides the records prescribed in Canon Law, in our diocese the pastor is to see that the parish keeps a register of First Communions and Register of Catechumens.
2. The sacramental registers are to be maintained and preserved in such a way as to assure their reliability, permanence, accuracy and authenticity.
 - a. Sacramental registers are permanent records. Care should be taken to purchase registers that are books of high quality and strong binding.
 - b. These registers are to be clearly marked. The front of the register is to include the type of register, the name of the parish, the city or town, and the range of dates in the register. Use of the index at the beginning of each register is also strongly encouraged. This will be a good help to those who in future years will need to reference your written records.
 - c. An inventory of the registers is to be created.
 - d. Registers should be kept in a protected place such as a safe, vault, or a locking, fireproof filing cabinet in the parish. They have to be protected along with official communications from the bishop and other official documents which are necessary to be preserved for posterity.
 - e. According to Canon Law, "the pastor is to take care that parish registers do not come into the hands of outsiders" (*CIC*, c.535, § 4). In the Diocese of Trenton, members of the public may not look through parish registers for the purpose of genealogical research.
 - f. The records should not be removed from the parish office. The pastor may give permission that a copy be made.
 - g. When the merger of parishes results in a "new" parish being erected, the sacramental registers of the merging parishes are closed on the date the "new" parish begins. New sacramental registers are opened for the newly erected parish.
 - h. The location in which the closed registers are to be stored will be specified in the decree merging the parish. Typically, this will be the office of the "new" parish, but the Bishop may specify otherwise.

NOTE: Although computerized files may be convenient for indexing needs, these are NEVER to be considered an acceptable substitute for the original handwritten registers. **The original handwritten Sacramental Registers are to be kept permanently. They are never to be destroyed.**

4. **The PASTOR is responsible** for the proper creation, maintenance and preservation of the sacramental registers (*CIC*, c.535, § 1). Even when he delegates the day-to-day administration of the records to a parish staff member, the pastor is responsible for the accurate and timely recording of sacramental celebrations (*CIC*, c. 877).

Those responsible for sacramental registers are legally and canonically bound to ensure that the information placed in the register is accurate, reliable, protected and that any certificates issued reflect the official record.

- a) Entries must be recorded in the register as soon as possible after the event occurs.
- b) The entries must be legible. Information should be entered in neatly printed letters not cursive handwriting. A good quality pen should be used, preferably black ink. Do not use pencil, colored ink, or felt-tipped marker.
- c) The entries are to include full names. The last and first names are to be spelled out, and at least the middle initial is to be included.
- d) The month is to be spelled out.
- e) Abbreviations, “nicknames” or other informalities are not to be used.
- f) The scotch tape degrades the actual records; therefore it is to be avoided.
- g) If correction of a record is necessary, a single line is to be drawn through the incorrect word and the correction written above it. Notation is to be made along with the date and signature of the person authorizing the change. “Whiteout”, erasures, or other cosmetic changes to the registers must never be made.

5. **The Certificate form** may be purchased or created by individual parishes (e.g., using desktop publishing programs), but it must contain the appropriate fields for all the information that is necessary as indicated below in Section II. The certificate must duplicate the information as it appears in the register.

- a. Photocopies of the register pages must not be made in lieu of certificate letter. The registers themselves are not open to examination by outside parties.
- b. The **certificate** is to be legible and authenticated, that is **signed only by the pastor or his delegate**, and stamped with the parish seal (*CIC*, c. 535, § 3). The signature on the certificate is to be original, not a stamp.
- c. The certificate must include all notations from the sacramental register as possible.
- d. The certificate should include a location where the sacramental celebration took place. This is important because some parishes have:
 - chapels

- more than one worship site (church building),
 - records of sacraments celebrated at institutions within the parish territory (i.e. high schools, colleges, hospitals, prisons);
 - records of parishes that have been merged or suppressed.
- e. If the register is incomplete, the certificate should indicate as such by using the words “not given” or with a dash rather than by leaving the space blank.
 - f. The certificate is to be issued based on information from the register, and not, for example, from an old certificate presented by an individual.
 - g. Routine requests for records between parishes and other dioceses, and from chancery offices (e.g., the Tribunal) for canonical purposes can be completed without permission of the individual.
6. If an individual has received a sacrament but the event was not recorded, the record can be recreated with appropriate proof.

Appropriate proof includes:

- copies of the canonical certificates and/or the civil certificates;
 - affidavits from the individual and two witnesses
 - an affidavit or letter from the cleric, who presided at/ministered the sacrament.
- a. In the case of the baptism of an adult, the oath of the individual or declaration of a single witness is all the evidence required (*CIC*, c.876).
 - b. Photographs or videos may be used as valid evidence when other evidence is not available or sufficient.
 - c. The entry is to be created and indexed.
 - d. Notations 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 a cross reference included in the notations of the entry and on the file.

II. SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

A. Baptismal Record is the primary record of person’s status within the church (*CIC*, c. 535, § 2). In general, the baptismal record is to include:

- Full name as found on birth certificate (the last and the first names are to be spelled out, and at least the middle initial is to

be included);

- Date and place of birth as found on birth certificate;
- Full name of father and his baptismal status (for Catholics, indicate Rite);
- Full name of mother (including mother's maiden name) and baptismal status, (for Catholics, indicate Rite);
- Full name of Minister of the Sacrament;
- Full names of the sponsors or witnesses and their baptismal status;
- Date and place of the conferred baptism (*CIC*, c. 877, §1);
- Names of proxies as it applies.

1. Notations of the reception of the other sacraments are also to be included in the baptismal register. Even if these sacraments are conferred at the same parish, the notations are to be recorded in the baptismal register and the corresponding index.
2. Additional notations to the register include those regarding religious profession, conditional baptisms, rites supplied, marriages, annulments, ordinations, dispensations from clerical celibacy and obligations of sacred orders, change of rite and dispensation from vows.
3. If the minister or witness of the sacrament is the individual completing the entry, then his signature is required. If someone other than the minister completes the entry, the name of the minister must be indicated.
4. Certificates are to be issued as soon as possible after the event is recorded in the register.
 - a) 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).
 - b) An official baptismal certificate is to be signed, dated, and sealed.
 - c) A notation at the bottom of the certificate regarding the entry number of the record in the register is optional.
 - d) The reverse of the baptismal certificate is to be completed as the notations indicate.
 - e) If there are no notations, the reverse of the certificate should be completed with the phrase "no notations" or "none recorded." The priest or deacon who signs the certificate should initial the reverse side.

5. **Sponsors** - Sponsors are chosen by the candidate for baptism or the candidate's parents or legal guardians (for an infant or minor child). In every case, at least one **sponsor/ godparent must be a completely**

initiated Catholic and meet the canonical requirements to be admitted to the role of sponsor (*CIC*, c. 874, §1-5). The one godparent may be male or female. If there are two godparents, one must be male and the other female (*CIC*, c. 873). A baptized non- Catholic is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism. (*CIC*, c. 874, § 2). When a baptized non- Catholic participates together with a Catholic sponsor, that person is recorded as a Christian witness to the baptism.

6. **Requests to Change Sponsor/Godparent** - In addition to the spiritual responsibilities of the godparent/sponsor, he/she serves as an official historical witness to a sacramental action and his/her name may not be removed from or replaced in the sacramental register. Another Catholic may actually fulfill the responsibilities of the godparent/sponsor, however, but without notation in the register.
7. **Unwed parents** - The name of the mother is to be entered in the register (*CIC* c. 877, § 2). The name of the father is to be inserted only if there is an acknowledgment by him. Otherwise, the phrase “father unknown” is to be used. The use of the phrase “illegitimate” is not recommended.
8. **Profession of Faith** is to be recorded in the **Baptismal Register** with a notation “profession of faith.” The facts of non-Catholic baptism should be entered in 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 Register.
9. **Emergencies** - When baptism occurs in an emergency situation, either at home or in an institution such as a hospital, notification is to be sent to and recorded at the territorial parish in which the home or institution is located.
 - The register is to be completed as outlined for ordinary baptism.
 - In cases when rites are supplied at the proper parish in the future, the date of baptism to be listed in the register is the date the “emergency baptism” took place. The words “rites supplied” and the date of the completion of the celebration are to be listed in the remarks column.
 - If an adult is baptized in a correction facility or prison, the baptism is to be recorded at the parish in which the institution is located.

10. **Adoption**

- a. It is recommended that baptism not take place until after the adoption is finalized and the birth certificate is issued. The entry in these cases should include the following:

- full name of the child as designated by the adopting parent(s),
- full names of the adopting parent(s),
- date and place of birth,
- names of the sponsors,
- date and place of the baptism
- the name of the minister performing the baptism.

b. When baptism occurs prior to adoption, the original entry is to include the notation: “*Adoption. Do not issue this record. See entry X, page X*”

- The new entry is to list the legal name of the individual, the names of the adopting parents and the name of the minister who conferred the sacrament.
- The new entry is not to include the names of the witnesses or sponsors of the baptism.
- The new certificate issued from this record is to include only the names of the adopting parents, the child’s legal surname, the date and place of baptism, and the name of the minister who conferred the sacraments.
- The names of the sponsors and any noted remarks are not to be entered on the certificate. (This is in accord with the USCCB decree of October 20, 2000.)
- Supporting documentation for the new entry would include a copy of the revised birth certificate issued by the state and the adoption decree. These documents are to be kept in the permanent files of the parish archives and are to include reference to the appropriate register and entry number.
- If the original baptismal record was made in a parish other than the adopting parents' parish, an entry is to be made in the register of the adoptive family’s parish citing the location of the original record, and list only the names of the adopting parents and date and place of birth. The certificate is to be issued from this entry.

B. First Communion Record

In the First Communion register the entry is to include:

- full name of the first communicant as found on his/her baptismal certificate,
- date and place of reception of first communion,
- date and place of baptism should also be entered (if the register used provides a place for this information),
- a current copy of the baptismal certificate is required as

- supporting documentation,
- a certificate is to be issued as soon as possible after the event is recorded in the register.

C. Confirmation Record

1. In general, the confirmation register is to include:
 - full name of the confirmed as found on his/her baptismal certificate,
 - confirmation name,
 - full names of the parents,
 - full name of the sponsor and baptismal status
 - date and place of the event and
 - name of the minister (*CIC*, c. 895).
2. A notation of the date and place of baptism should also be entered.
3. A copy of the baptism certificate is required as supporting documentation.
4. A confirmation certificate is to be issued as soon as possible after the event is recorded in the register.
5. Notification of the reception of confirmation is to be sent to the place of baptism.
6. The date and place of the reception of this sacrament is to be noted in the Baptism Register even if the sacrament took place in the same parish.

D. Order of Christian Initiation of Adults (OCIA formerly RCIA)

With the promulgation of the revised Order 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** and the **Book of the Elect**.

1. A register of Catechumens is kept at the parish and is required for those who have gone through the Rite of Entrance into the Catechumenate. The Register of Catechumens should include:
 - Full name of the individual
 - Name of the sponsor(s)
 - Name of the minister of the Rite
 - Date and the place of the Rite

2. Catechumens have the privilege to celebrate marriage according to the ritual of the Roman Catholic Church.
 - Marriages involving catechumens are noted in the marriage register.
 - To ensure that proper permission and dispensation have been granted, the register should clearly indicate which party(ies) is/are catechumen
 - For those whose names appear in the Register of catechumens a suitable cross-reference should be made.
3. The Book of the Elect register lists the names of the catechumens who have gone through the Rite of Election. The Book of the Elect is the brought with the catechumens to the Cathedral and presented to the Bishop ritually during the Rite of Election.
4. It is not common practice in the Diocese of Trenton for parishes to have a separate Reception into Full Communion register in which to list the names of those individuals who have been received into full communion with the Catholic Church. The Profession of faith and Reception into Full Communion is instead recorded in the parish baptismal and confirmation registers as described in A.8 above.

E. Marriage Record

1. In general, the marriage register is to include:
 - full names of the spouses (the bride's name as found on her baptismal certificate, or if not baptized, her legal name),
 - full names of the parents of the spouses,
 - full names of the witnesses,
 - name of the officiant,
 - date and place of the marriage celebration (*CIC*, c. 1121, § 1),
 - date and place of baptism of each party as it applies,
 - notation regarding dispensation, permission, nullity, etc., as it applies,
 - when priests/deacon from outside the parish officiate with proper delegation, that is to be noted in the records column or DELEGATED (DELEGATUS) is to be printed after their signature.
2. 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” must include:

- current (dated less than six months prior to request) baptismal certificates for baptized parties if possible to obtain,
 - completed prenuptial forms,
 - copy of civil marriage license,
 - civil marriage certificate (in cases of radical sanation or a convalidation),
 - death certificate (when necessary),
 - copy of necessary dispensation, permission, or delegation, decree of nullity (when necessary),
 - additional prenuptial forms or documentation required by the diocese (e.g., marriage preparation certificate and Natural Family Planning certificate).
3. It is the responsibility of the officiant to promptly file any and all civil documents with the appropriate county.
- a) The sacramental certificate is to be issued as soon as possible after the marriage has been recorded.
 - b) Notification of the marriage is to be sent to the place(s) of baptism of the Catholic party(ies), by the party responsible for marriage preparation.
 - c) The date and place of the reception of this sacrament is to be recorded in the baptismal register, even if the place of the baptism is the same parish as the place of marriage.
4. Marriages are ordinarily to be recorded in the register of the parish at which the ceremony takes place. (Note the exception in the second bullet below.)
- In cases where the ceremony occurs in the chapel of an institution, the marriage is to be recorded in the parish in which the institution is located.
 - 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 (*CIC*, c. 1121, §1). The prenuptial file or marriage data envelope is kept at the parish in which the preparation took place.
 - Notification of the marriage is to be sent to the place(s) of baptism of the Catholic party(ies) by the person 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.
5. Marriage Notations which may be used in the marriage register are notations about dispensations from impediments, permissions, decrees of dissolution or nullity, convalidations and sanations. The recommended format for the notations is as follows:
- Dispensation from disparity of cult granted by diocese, date;
 - Permission from a mixed marriage granted by the local Ordinary through the Diocesan Chancery (*CIC c.1124, 1125*), date;
 - Dispensation from canonical form granted by diocese, date;
 - Dissolution or Decree of nullity granted, date, protocol number, diocese;
 - Convalidation;
 - Radical Sanation issued by diocese, date.

F. Holy Orders

A certificate is to be issued as soon as possible after the event is recorded and notification of deaconate transitional and permanent as well as priesthood ordination is to be sent to the place of baptism.

- a) The date and place and kind of the ordination, and the name of the Bishop conferring the sacrament are to be noted in the baptismal register.
- b) The Ordination Register is kept and maintained at the Chancery.

G. Religious Profession

Records relating to the profession of perpetual vows are maintained by Individual Orders. Notification of the profession of perpetual vows is to be sent to the place of baptism. The date and place of profession, the name of the witness to the vows and the name of the Religious Institute or Society of Apostolic Life are to be noted in the baptismal register.

H. Death Record

Although death is not a sacrament, a register is kept and it generally includes:

- full name of the deceased,
- date of death,
- name of the presider,
- date and place of burial.

The register should clearly indicate whether the deceased was a catechumen. For those whose names appear in the Register of Catechumens a suitable cross reference should be made.

Notations may include additional information such as next of kin, age, whether anointed, name of funeral home and cause of death.

In the event that the funeral rites do not include a mass at the parish but only a service at the funeral home, an entry is made in the death register if the person is considered a parishioner. In the event the parish priest is attending a funeral service as a representative member of the clergy but the individual does not have a connection to the parish, no entry is made.

I. Institutions

Sacramental records of Catholic hospitals, or institutions such as jails which are located within the boundaries of particular parishes, are to be maintained at the parish in which the institution is located, and not at the parish of the chaplain or other minister of the sacrament.

J. Eastern Catholic Churches

Members of Eastern Catholic Churches are subject to the Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches.

- a) Whenever Roman Catholic minister lawfully celebrate the sacraments for Eastern Catholics, these sacraments are entered in the appropriate registers of the Roman Catholic parish.
- b) The name of the particular Eastern Rite (e.g. Maronite) is to be noted on the remarks column in the sacramental register. A notation in the index as to the rite may also be made.