



**ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE  
OF  
LOS ANGELES**

**HANDBOOK FOR  
SACRAMENTAL RECORDS**

**Offices of  
the Chancellor  
the Vicar for Canonical Services  
and  
Divine Worship**

**Revised 2018**

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Archdiocese of Cincinnati pioneered an earlier version of this policy handbook, and the Diocese of Dallas reworked it for its own purposes. We are most grateful for the benefit of their experience as we have now adapted it for our circumstances in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

The translations of the *Canons* used in this handbook are taken from the New English Translation of the *Code of Canon Law* published by the Canon Law Society of America in 1999, and from the New English Translation of the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* published by the Canon Law Society of America in 2001.

## PROMULGATION AD EXPERIMENTUM

Given the wide diversity of situations in the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, it is our intention to publish the policy directives of this handbook on a provisional basis for three years, with a view to soliciting input from the Pastors/Parish Administrators/Parish Life Directors of the Archdiocese from their experiences in implementing them. This experience and input will provide the basis for any necessary revisions before the Ordinary promulgates Archdiocesan particular law on sacramental records on a more stable basis.

Given at the Offices of the Archdiocesan Curia on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of May 2018.

*José H. Gomez (original signed on 5/9/2018)*

---

Most Reverend José H. Gomez  
Archbishop of Los Angeles

*Sister Mary Elizabeth Galt, B.V.M. (original signed 5/9/2018)*

---

Sister Mary Elizabeth Galt, B.V.M.  
Chancellor

*Reverend Joseph Fox, O.P. (original signed 5/9/2018)*

---

Reverend Joseph Fox, O.P.  
Vicar for Canonical Services/Vice Chancellor

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>Page</u>
<b><u>GENERAL NORMS</u></b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Registers</b>	<b>1</b>
Required Records; Parishes, Other Institutions; Format; Acid-Free Paper; Computer Reproductions; Repair of Old Registers; Safe Storage; Reporting Loss or Destruction; Unusual Situations	
<b>Confidentiality</b>	<b>2</b>
Nature of Information; Access to Registers; Authorized Personnel; Genealogical Research	
<b>Entries</b>	<b>3</b>
Type of Data; Timeliness; Place of Entry; Chronological Order; Specific Columns; Index; Excess Data; "Sacramental Records" File; Printing/Ink; Style for Names and Dates; Confidential Data; Sacramental Minister; Unusual Situations	
<b>Certificates</b>	<b>4</b>
Definition; Church Use Only; Authorized Source of Records; Authorized Requests; Procedure for Requests; Format; Authentication; Required Data; Missing Record	
<b>Changes to Entries</b>	<b>6</b>
Caution about Changes; Style for Minor Changes; Style for Major Changes; Authorization for Insubstantial Changes; Authorization for Substantial Changes; Permitted Changes; Non-Permitted Changes; Data on Certificates after Changes	
 <b><u>BAPTISMAL REGISTER</u></b>	 <b>7</b>
<b>Entries</b>	<b>7</b>
Basic Process; Source of Data; Recipients from More than One Parish; Baptism Outside Parish Church; Emergency Baptism; Conditional Baptism; RCIA Celebration of Baptism of an Adult; Reception into Full Communion of Baptized Adults; Bringing a Baptized Child into the Church; Unmarried Parents; Children of Unknown Parentage;	

## **BAPTISMAL REGISTER**

**Page**

### **Entries (Continued)**

**12**

Adoption: Baptism Celebrated after Adoption;  
Adoption: Baptism Celebrated Before Adoption; Number  
of Godparents; Christian Godparents; Christian Witness;  
Proxy Godparent; Ascription to Proper Church *Sui Iuris*;  
Registers for Ritual Use

### **Changes to Entries**

**14**

Most Changes Occur in the Baptismal Register; Changes to  
Original Data; Additions to "Notations" Column; Defection from  
the Church; Style for Notations

## **CONFIRMATION REGISTER**

**15**

### **Entries**

**15**

Basic Process; Emergency Confirmation; Source of Data;  
Large Group of Recipients; Multiple Ministers; Recipients from  
More than One Parish; Baptismal Certificate; Baptismal Data;  
Notification of Church of Baptism

## **MARRIAGE REGISTER**

**16**

### **Registers**

**16**

Basic Process; Source of Data; Marriage Outside Parish Church;  
Convalidation; Sanation; RCIA Catechumens and Candidates;  
Notification of Church of Baptism

### **Premarital Files**

**18**

Contents; Location; Filing; Retention; Transmission of File

## **DEATH REGISTER**

**19**

### **Entries**

**19**

Basic Process; Source of Data; Cremation; Notification of  
Church of Baptism

	<u>Page</u>
<u>CANONS ON SACRAMENTAL RECORDS IN GENERAL</u>	20
<u>CANONS REGARDING BAPTISMAL RECORDS</u>	21
<u>CANONS REGARDING CONFIRMATION RECORDS</u>	22
<u>CANONS REGARDING MARRIAGE RECORDS</u>	23
<u>CANON REGARDING DEATH RECORDS</u>	23

## **GENERAL NORMS**

### **REGISTERS**

#### ***Required Records***

Each parish is required to maintain records of Baptisms, Confirmations, Marriages and Deaths.<sup>1</sup> Records of First Communions are optional.

#### ***Parishes, Other Institutions***

Generally, only parishes are to maintain sacramental records and registers. Non-parochial institutions must obtain the express approval of the Chancellor to maintain sacramental records and registers.<sup>2</sup>

#### ***Format***

Special registers (which are available from private vendors) using handwritten entries are required. A parish may retain separate Baptismal, Confirmation, Marriage and Death Registers, or combined registers depending on the needs of the parish.

#### ***Acid-Free Paper***

The pages of the registers should be made of acid-free paper.

#### ***Computer Reproductions***

Sacramental records may be duplicated on secure computers with no public access, and historical copies may be maintained electronically in a non-public format only. But a complete handwritten record must be maintained in the registers, and the registers themselves are never to be destroyed or discarded. The handwritten registers are considered the only authentic copy of sacramental records.

#### ***Repair of Old Registers***

As registers become worn, they are to be rebound professionally. If a register is beyond repair, the records may be transferred to a new register. The original is to be retained in as safe a condition as possible.

#### ***Safe Storage***

The sacramental registers are to be stored in a locked place, preferably one which is fire-proof or fire-resistant. They may be removed only by authorized personnel and only for legitimate purposes. The registers may never be taken off the parish premises except for microfilming or electronic storage by the Archdiocese.

---

<sup>1</sup> Even when a priest serves as pastor of more than one parish, separate registers are to be maintained for each parish. For security and convenience, however, the registers may all be stored at one of the parishes.

<sup>2</sup> If a chapel or pastoral center operates under the authority of the local pastor, the official sacramental records are to be kept in the parish registers. The chapel or pastoral center may keep duplicate but unofficial records.

***Reporting Loss or  
Destruction***

The loss or destruction of any sacramental register should be reported immediately to the Office of the Chancellor.

***Unusual Situations***

In the case of unusual situations, the Vicar for Canonical Services for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles should be contacted directly for assistance prior to recording the information in the sacramental register.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

***Nature of Information***

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.

***Access to Registers***

The sacramental registers belong to the individual parish. They are maintained for the good of the Christian faithful; but they are private documents, not public ones. No one other than the pastor, the Ordinary, the Episcopal Vicar(s), the Deans or their delegate(s) can claim a right to direct access to the registers or to any versions or copies of them in any format.

***Authorized Personnel***

The pastor is always and ultimately responsible for the care and confidentiality of the sacramental registers themselves, as well as any reproductions. He may designate other persons to make entries in the registers and to prepare certificates. These may be employees or volunteers, but their number should be small. These designated persons must be known well to the pastor, must be capable of careful work and protecting confidentiality, and must be adequately trained to work with the registers. Their work with the registers is not to exceed their mandate from the pastor.

***Genealogical Research***

Sacramental registers should never be made available to genealogical researchers. The pastor or other regularly designated person may research information as requested and as time permits, and make the information available on separate paper. Care must be taken not to disclose confidential information.

## ENTRIES

<b><i>Type of Data</i></b>	Only that data required by <i>Canon Law</i> and otherwise necessary for the complete and accurate maintenance of sacramental records is to be entered in the sacramental registers.
<b><i>Timeliness</i></b>	Entries to be recorded should be made as soon as possible after the event.
<b><i>Place of Entry</i></b>	As a general rule, the proper parish for the recording of Sacraments and Death is the parish in which territory the Sacraments or Rites of Christian Burial were celebrated. For exceptions, see the individual register sections below [beginning on p. 7].
<b><i>Chronological Order</i></b>	Entries should be made in chronological order. If the chronological order cannot be kept in some particular case, a small note should be made in the proper chronological location in the register, cross-referencing the actual entry, e.g., "See JONES, page 37."
<b><i>Specific Columns</i></b>	Each page of the register has several columns, and each column is titled. It is important to enter the data in the proper column. At least the Baptismal Register will have a column titled "Remarks," "Notations" or something similar. There are many references to this column throughout this Handbook. <sup>3</sup>
<b><i>Index</i></b>	Every entry is to be listed in the register's index according to the person's last name.
<b><i>Excess Data</i></b>	If there is inadequate space for all the data to be entered, the excess data may be entered elsewhere on the same page or even on a different page of the register. Clear cross-referencing is essential, e.g., "See SMITH, bottom of page."
<b><i>"Sacramental Records" File</i></b>	Discursive material should not be written in sacramental registers. Such material or related documents, e.g., civil records, correspondence, etc.) should be retained securely in a file in the parish archives. However, discretion must be exercised in deciding which material to place in this file; not everything has to be retained. This file should be marked "Sacramental Records"

---

<sup>3</sup> For the sake of convenience, this column will be referred to as the "Notations" column throughout the Handbook.



and the words “See Sacramental Records File” should be printed in the “Notations” column of the sacramental register.

***Printing/Ink***

Neat printing is preferred to script. Entries should be made in fade-proof, waterproof ink.

***Style for Names and Dates***

The last name of the entry’s subject should be printed in upper case, e.g., “JONES.” Printing the name of the month is preferred to using the month’s number, e.g., “Aug” rather than “8”.

***Confidential Data***

Data which is confidential and which is not to be included on certificates is to be so marked when entered in the register, e.g., “Confidential – do not include on certificate.” However, the provisions of *Can. 535 §2* are to be observed.

***Sacramental Minister***

The actual minister of a Sacrament does not need to sign the register if the person making the entry personally witnessed the event or has available a document (e.g., Sacristy Record of Baptism) signed by the minister, which certifies the conferral of the Sacrament. In these cases, the name of the minister is printed in the register.

***Unusual Situations***

In the case of unusual situations, the Vicar for Canonical Services for the Archdiocese of Los Angeles should be contacted directly for assistance prior to recording the information in the sacramental register.

## **CERTIFICATES**

***Definition***

A certificate is an official document certifying that a particular individual has received a Sacrament. It is an exact duplicate of non-confidential data already entered in a sacramental register.

***Church Use Only***

Certificates of Sacraments are intended primarily for internal church use, not for civil purposes, although Certificates have evidentiary weight in civil and criminal proceedings.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Since certain data is entered in the sacramental registers based purely on the word of someone (e.g., the date of birth of a person being baptized), the certificate is simply repeating that data but not certifying it as true.

***Authorized Source  
of Records***

Only the parish or other location holding the original sacramental record may issue a certificate.<sup>5</sup> Only the actual register, rather than a microfilm or electronic reproduction, should be used in preparing certificates. In preparing a certificate, any microfilm or electronic copy of the record must be compared with the register so as to assure that the copy corresponds identically to the original.

***Authorized Requests***

Any member of the Christian faithful has a right to obtain a certificate of a Sacrament he or she has received and which was recorded in a sacramental register. But only that person, the parents of a minor, someone with legal guardianship of another, a bona fide pastoral minister at another Catholic parish, and a diocesan tribunal official have this right. When the parents of a child are separated or divorced, both parents – regardless of legal custody – are presumed to have the right to a certificate.

***Procedure for Requests***

Requests for certificates should be submitted to the parish in person in writing with a valid photo identification of the person making the request, although telephone requests from a Catholic parish or Catholic agency are acceptable. The written requests and a log of telephone requests should be kept on file for one year. No information from sacramental registers should be accepted or provided by telephone or other electronic means except to another Catholic parish or other Catholic agency. Even then, care for the privacy and identity of persons is to be exercised.

***Format***

Certificates should have an official appearance and should be issued in a consistent format. Parishes may obtain blank certificates from commercial vendors or may have them printed locally. All certificates must bear the name and complete address of the parish.

***Authentication***

Certificates must be typed, printed by computer or hand-printed in ink. They are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and impressed with the parish seal. Photostat and facsimile copies of certificates are not considered authentic documents.

***Required Data***

Certificates are to include all data contained in the sacramental register, except that which is marked confidential or which is extraneous to the person's canonical status. Data in the "Notations" column is to be included. If there is no data in the

---

<sup>5</sup> When a parish closes or merges, formal arrangements are made for the transfer and retention of its sacramental registers. Contact the Office of the Chancellor as to where these are to be maintained.

“Notations” column, the words “No Notations” should be printed on the certificate.

### ***Missing Record***

Sometimes when a certificate is requested, the record in question cannot be found. If there is any possibility that the Sacrament may have been conferred in some other parish, the inquirer should be encouraged to check the sacramental records of that other parish or parishes or consult the Archdiocesan Archives. If such a search is unwarranted or fails, *Canons 876 and 1573* can be applied. Only that data which can be vouched for with certainty should be entered in the register, even though this may leave an incomplete entry. The name of the witness or witnesses, the date of his/her/their testimony and the words “Based on the testimony of \_\_\_\_\_” should be printed in the “Notations” column of the register.

## **CHANGES TO ENTRIES**

### ***Caution about Changes***

Once entered into a sacramental register, data is considered official and permanent. It may not be modified except under special conditions as detailed below. Original data is never to be scratched out, erased, “whited-out” or otherwise destroyed, obliterated or rendered illegible.

### ***Style for Minor Changes***

Minor changes (e.g., correcting a misspelling) may be made directly to the original entry. Such changes are to be made by drawing a straight, simple line through the word, number or letter to be changed and printing the change immediately above or below it.

### ***Style for Major Changes***

Major changes, e.g., to record an adoption after Baptism, may require that a new entry be created. In these cases,

- the original entry is to be preserved without change;
- a new entry, with all the data from the original entry reproduced (except the relevant change or changes), is to be made in the same register as close to the original entry as possible;
- both entries, as well as listing in the index, are to be cross-referenced;
- “Do Not Issue Certificate from This Record” is to be printed carefully across the face of the original entry without obliterating any information.

***Authorization for  
Insubstantial Changes***

An insubstantial error (e.g., a misspelling) may be corrected upon request of those persons who have a right to a certificate, as mentioned in the “Certificates” section above.

***Authorization for  
Substantial Changes***

More significant errors and other changes require authentic supporting documentation. Such documentation will ordinarily consist of an original, “raised seal” certificate from a civil or ecclesiastical office, court, agency, etc. The issuing agency, date of the certification and any protocol number should be printed in the “Notations” column of the register. When an error involves data pertaining directly to the celebration of a Sacrament or Rite of Christian Burial (e.g., date, identity of godparent) such that no external verifying documentation exists, the written or oral testimony of a reputable witness will suffice.

***Permitted Changes***

Some permitted changes:

- correct name
- correct date
- correct spelling
- new legal name
- adoptive parent(s)

***Non-Permitted Changes***

Some non-permitted changes:

- new godparents or sponsors<sup>6</sup>
- non-adoptive step-parents
- customary name or nickname

***Data on Certificates  
After Changes***

Once specific data has been changed in the sacramental register, the original data is not transcribed onto certificates, e.g., the natural parents’ names after adoption.

## **BAPTISMAL REGISTER**

### **ENTRIES**

***Basic Process***

For Baptism celebrated under normal circumstances, the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register (*Can. 877 §1*):

---

<sup>6</sup> The names of godparents or sponsors are not to be changed because they have died or because the parents or sacramental recipients feel they are no longer suitable. In such situations, parents or recipients can ask someone else to serve in this role without making a change in the permanent record or on the certificate.

1. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the parent(s)/adoptive parents, or the legal name of the adult (always use the maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name), or names of adoptive parents;
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name(s) of the sponsor(s);
5. the place and date of the Baptism; and
6. the name of the minister performing the Baptism.

### ***Source of Data***

Ordinarily, the data used to create a record of Baptism (as required by *Can. 877 §1*) originates on a "Sacristy Record of Baptism," a small form from a preprinted pad sold by commercial vendors.

**A birth certificate is required in order to verify information.<sup>7</sup>**

The Sacristy Record is filled out by someone in the parish office at the time the Baptism is scheduled by a member of the Baptism Preparation Team during the Catechetical Program, or by the minister of Baptism at the time of the actual Baptism. Before the data is transferred to the Baptismal Register, a parent, guardian or adult candidate should verify the data written on the Sacristy Record (usually at the time of Baptism), and the minister must sign the Sacristy Record verifying that the Sacrament was conferred. There should be a clear procedure in place for assuring that the data is transferred from the Sacristy Record to the Baptismal Register as quickly as possible.

### ***Recipients from More than One Parish***

When persons from more than one parish are baptized or received into full communion with the Catholic Church at a single ceremony, the record for all the persons is to be retained at the parish where the Rites are celebrated. Home parishes may keep an unofficial duplicate record.

### ***Baptism Outside Parish Church***

When Baptism is conferred solemnly (that is, with a cleric celebrating the full Rite of Baptism) in a chapel, hospital or home (*Cans. 877 §1* and *878*), the minister is to see to it that the requisite data is transmitted in writing to the territorial parish in which the chapel, hospital or home is located for recording in the Baptismal Register.

---

<sup>7</sup> If a birth certificate cannot be presented for inspection, an entry in the "Notations" column must be made describing the source of the date and place of birth information (e.g., "DOB, POB stated by parents or name of witness" or "DOB, POB as shown in Canadian Passport #xxxxxxxxx."

### ***Emergency Baptism***

When a Catholic Baptism is conferred in an emergency situation, that is, in a non-parish facility such as a hospital or jail, a ceremony may be supplied at a later date. The Baptism itself is to be recorded properly in the territorial parish of the hospital, jail or other facility. If the ceremony is supplied at a later date (cf. 1973 Rite of Baptism for Children #31.3), a notation should be made in the margin of the baptismal entry of the territorial parish indicating the date and place the ceremony was supplied.

After the conferral of the emergency Baptism, the minister of Baptism completes a Certificate of Emergency Baptism and gives it to the one who is baptized or, in the case of an infant or child, to the parents. The one baptized or the parents of the one baptized can then present this Certificate to the pastor of the parish in which he/she is a member so that the Baptism can be noted in the Baptismal Register of that parish. The Baptism itself will be recorded in the territorial parish where the Baptism occurred. The Certificate will inform the baptized person's pastor that the Baptism occurred and was recorded in the territorial parish where the Baptism occurred. In this way, should the one receiving Baptism (or the parents) forget where the Baptism is recorded, the parish in which he or she was registered or was a member can supply this information.

The entry in the Baptismal Register of the territorial parish in which the emergency Baptism occurred is the official entry for this Sacrament. Certificates of Baptism are to be issued only from this Register.

Thus, all emergency Baptisms in any facility conducted by any Catholic cleric or any lay minister, Catholic or non-Catholic, are to be recorded in the territorial parish in which they have occurred. However, in order that these records may be located at a future time, the home parish of the person receiving Baptism also should record the receipt of Baptism, indicating when and where it occurred.

### ***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. The sacramental minister is reminded to observe the provisions of *Canon 869* in making any decision to administer Baptism conditionally.

***RCIA Celebration of  
Baptism of an Adult***

For Baptism celebrated for a non-Baptized adult (RCIA), the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register (*Can. 877 §1*):

1. the given and/or Christian name(s) of the person (always use the maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name of the sponsor(s);
5. the date and place of the Baptism;
6. the name of the minister performing the Baptism; and
7. marginal notations of reception of Eucharist and Confirmation<sup>8</sup> and of marital status (either current valid marriage or the convalidation of the current marriage). Any declaration of invalidity (including where granted and protocol number) should be noted.

***Reception into Full  
Communion of  
Baptized Adults***

When persons are received into full communion with the Catholic Church, after having been baptized previously in another Christian community that practices valid Baptism, an entry must be made in both the Baptismal Register and Confirmation Register.

For the “full reception into the Church” celebrated for a baptized adult, the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register:

1. the given and/or Christian name(s) of the person (always use the maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name of the sponsor;
5. the date and place of the Rite of Reception are noted in the space provided for Baptism;
6. marginal notations giving the date and place of the original Baptism, reception of Eucharist and Confirmation, and marital status (either current valid marriage or the convalidation of the current marriage). Any declaration of invalidity (including where granted and protocol number) should be noted.

---

<sup>8</sup> The reception of Confirmation also needs to be recorded in the Confirmation Register.

***Bringing a Baptized  
Child into the Church***

For already baptized children who are being received into the Catholic Church before age 7 (*Can. 852 §1*), the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register<sup>9</sup>:

1. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the parent(s);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the name(s) of the sponsor(s) now selected by the parents;
5. the date and place ceremonies are supplied to effect formal reception into the Church are noted in the spaces provided for Baptism; and
6. data concerning the original Baptism should be entered in the "Notations" column, especially the date and place (church and town).

***Unmarried Parents***

It is important that the provisions of *Can. 877 §2* concerning unmarried parents be followed. It is unjust to enter unauthorized names of parents in the Baptismal Register. [See p. 4 above, "Unusual Situations."]

***Children of  
Unknown Parentage***

For a child whose parentage cannot be known (*Can. 870*) or is unknown (*Can. 877 §2*), the following information is to be entered in the Baptismal Register:

1. the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the mother or guardian(s);
2. the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name), if publicly known or requested by her before two witnesses;
3. the name of the natural father (first, middle if any, and surname) only if paternity is established by a legal document or he makes a declaration before the pastor and two witnesses; otherwise, leave blank;
4. the date and place of birth, if known, or of being found or placed under guardianship;
5. the name(s) of the sponsor(s) selected by the parent or guardian;
6. the date and place of the Baptism; and
7. the name of the minister performing the Baptism.

---

<sup>9</sup> This procedure is to be followed also when the child is being received along with the parents into full communion with the Catholic Church.



***Adoption:  
Baptism Celebrated  
After Adoption***

For children baptized after adoption, no reference to the adoption or the natural parents is to be made in the Baptismal Register. Any such data which has been recorded is to be treated as confidential and is not to be included on any certificate.

The following information shall be entered in the Baptismal 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 name(s) of the sponsor(s) selected by the adoptive parent(s);
5. the date and place of the Baptism; and
6. the name of the minister performing the Baptism.

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.

***Adoption:  
Baptism Celebrated  
Before Adoption***

For children baptized before adoption, the following information shall be added in the Baptismal Register after adoption is finalized (*Can. 877 §3*):

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

**REMINDER: DO NOT USE "WHITE OUT" OR OBLITERATE ORIGINAL INFORMATION IN ANY WAY.**

Baptismal certificates issued by the parish for these individuals should give the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s), the child's new legal surname, the date and place of birth, the date and place of Baptism, and the name of the minister who administered the Sacrament. The name(s) of the natural parents and the sponsor(s) shall not be given, and no mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate.

To avoid confusion, an entirely new entry can be made, and in the index cross-reference should be made to the old entry, with the following information:

1. the new legal Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s);
2. the names of the adoptive parent(s);
3. the date and place of birth;
4. the date and place of the Baptism; and
5. the name of the minister performing the Baptism.

Any certificate for this person should be issued from the record created after the adoption. No certificate should ever be issued from the record created before adoption.

***Number of Godparents***

No more than two names may be entered in the “Godparents” or “Sponsors” column. *Canon 873* stipulates that if there are two sponsors, then one must be male and the other female.

***Christian Witness***

*Canon 874 §2* allows for a baptized non-Catholic to serve as a “Christian witness” along with a Catholic sponsor. In such a case, the words “Christian witness” should be placed after the witness’ name in the register.

Note that the *Ecumenical Directory* (#98.b) allows a baptized Eastern Orthodox person to serve as a sponsor rather than as a Christian witness, provided there is a second sponsor who is Catholic.

***Proxy Godparent***

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.

***Ascription to Proper Church Sui Iuris***

Ascription to an Eastern Church *sui iuris* in union with Rome (e.g., Byzantine, Maronite) is normally determined by the ritual Church of the father, not by the rite of the minister or parish of Baptism, unless the person is 14 years of age or older, in which case the individual can choose his or her Church *sui iuris* of ascription. Thus, when a Latin minister baptizes someone who by law is ascribed to an Eastern Catholic Church, a notation should be made in the “Notations” column.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> For assistance in this regard, and preferably before scheduling the Baptism, the case should be referred to the Office of the Vicar for Canonical Services or to the Tribunal to clarify issues of jurisdiction and ascription. If by chance an Eastern Church minister should celebrate Baptism in a Latin Church, care should be taken to identify clearly the Church ascription of the baptized person.

***Registers for  
Ritual Use***

A register used as part of the Church's ritual (e.g., *Book of the Elect*) should be completely distinct from the regular sacramental registers. The data from the ritual register should be transferred to the Baptismal and Confirmation Registers as soon as possible after the conferral of Sacraments or the reception into full communion.

## **CHANGES TO ENTRIES**

***Most Changes Occur in  
the Baptismal Register***

The baptismal record is the primary sacramental record for Catholics. It serves as a log for all the significant, public developments in one's relationship with the Church. As a result, most changes to entries in the sacramental registers will be made in the Baptismal Register.

***Changes to  
Original Data***

Some of these changes are actual modifications of the original data entered for Baptism – for example, change of name or change of parent. Directions for making such changes can be found in the "General Norms" section of this Handbook, beginning on p. 6.

***Additions to  
"Notations" Column***

Some of the changes are additions to the "Notations" column. For example, when a Catholic is confirmed, married or ordained, the churches where these Sacraments are celebrated should notify the church of Baptism so the new Sacraments can be noted in the Baptismal Register. Also, when a marriage is declared invalid by an ecclesiastical tribunal or when an individual is returned to the lay state, the Tribunal or Diocesan Curia will notify the church of Baptism so that a notation can be made in the person's baptismal record (*Can. 1685*). Notification documents should include a "turn around" document to verify that notations have been recorded.

***Defection from  
the Church***

A parish occasionally will receive a notification from an individual or a church indicating that the person is no longer a Catholic and even asking that his or her name be removed from Catholic Church records. Since a decision of the Catholic Church in 2009, there are no consequences in Church Law affecting Church records. Thus, no changes should be made to these records.

***Style for Notations***

The notations mentioned in the two preceding paragraphs should be made neatly and succinctly in the "Notations" column. Names, dates, places and protocol numbers are usually the only information needed. These notations are not confidential and should ordinarily be included on certificates.

## CONFIRMATION REGISTER

### ENTRIES

#### ***Basic Process***

For Confirmation celebrated under normal circumstances, the following information is to be entered in the Confirmation Register (*Can. 895*):

1. the legal and Christian names of the child or adult (use maiden name of a woman);
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name);
3. the date and place of Baptism;
4. the name of the sponsor selected by the person;
5. the date and place of the Confirmation;
6. the title and name of the minister performing the Confirmation, e.g., “Bishop John SMITH” or “Father Joseph JONES.”

The place of Baptism should be notified of the Confirmation. In the case of a baptized person who was brought “into full communion with the Church,” the place of reception (“Profession of Faith”) is to be notified instead of the place of Baptism.

#### ***Emergency Confirmation***

As in the case of emergency Baptism, the record of an emergency Confirmation is to be kept in the territorial parish in which the Confirmation occurred.

#### ***Source of Data***

When a large number of persons are to be confirmed, it is essential that someone collect the necessary information and see to it that it is communicated accurately to the parish or parishes of the recipients for proper recording in the baptismal registers.

#### ***Large Group of Recipients***

When several persons are confirmed at the same ceremony by the same minister, the date of conferral and the name of the minister may be written only once in the register, so long as it is clear that the references apply to all the confirmed.

#### ***Multiple Ministers***

If there is more than one minister at a single ceremony, the record should clearly show which ministers confirmed which recipients.

***Recipients from More than One Parish***

When Confirmation is conferred upon persons from two or more parishes at one ceremony, all records are made at the parish where Confirmation was celebrated with notification sent to the parish(es) of Baptism.

***Baptismal Certificate***

In order to satisfy the obligation of notifying the parish of Baptism about the conferral of Confirmation, a baptismal certificate for each candidate for Confirmation should be obtained in advance of the celebration of Confirmation.<sup>11</sup>

***Baptismal Data***

It is recommended that the place and date of Baptism be noted in the Confirmation Register. (This can be especially helpful when a person has difficulty locating a baptismal record later in life.)

***Notification of Church of Baptism***

Notification of the church of Baptism about the fact of Confirmation should be made as soon as possible by the pastor of the place where the record of Confirmation is retained. This notification is to include the name of the recipient and the date of Baptism, as well as the place and date of Confirmation. The names of the minister, parents and sponsor are not required. When a person previously baptized in another Christian community is received into full communion and confirmed, the church of Baptism is not notified. Notification documents should include a “turn around” document to verify notations have been recorded.

## **MARRIAGE REGISTER**

### **REGISTERS**

***Basic Process***

For weddings celebrated with recognition by the Catholic Church, the following information is to be entered into the Marriage Register (*Cans. 1122-1123*):

---

<sup>11</sup> Additional reasons for obtaining a baptismal certificate are: (1) the fact of valid Baptism and Catholicity will be established; (2) any previous reception of valid Confirmation, especially in the case of Catholics baptized in Eastern *sui iuris* Churches, will be uncovered; (3) any discrepancies between name and parentage provided in the Baptismal Register and given at the time of Confirmation will be discovered; (4) the identity of baptismal godparents can be ascertained, pursuant to *Can. 893 §2*.

1. the legal names of the groom;
2. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name) of the groom;
3. the legal names of the bride (always use the maiden name of a woman, even if she was previously married);
4. the name of the father (first, middle if any, and surname) and the name of the mother (first, middle if any, and maiden name) of the bride;
5. the date and place of Baptism of each party;
6. the date and place (actual church and town) of the wedding;
7. the names of the witnesses;
8. the title and name of the assisting minister asking for and receiving the couple's vows; and
9. notation of any permissions, dispensations and delegations obtained for the valid celebration of the wedding (including protocol number if existing).

The informational facts in the premarital file are the source for the Marriage Register. The marginal "Notations" column is for the purpose of noting any permission or dispensation, regardless of the source for the permission/dispensation, and other significant factors (for instance, delegation for the assisting minister or sanation).

#### ***Source of Data***

The pastor is responsible for seeing that the necessary information is recorded in the parish where the marriage was celebrated. The Premarital File ordinarily contains all the necessary information. However, the celebrant should be alert to any last-minute changes or corrections to the information contained in the Premarital File.

#### ***Marriage Outside Parish Church***

When a marriage is celebrated in a location other than a parish church (e.g., a chapel), the proper parish for the marriage record is the territorial church in which that location stands. The only exception is for a marriage celebrated with a dispensation from the Catholic form. In that situation, the proper parish for the marriage record is the parish of the Catholic party.

#### ***Convalidation***

When a marriage is convalidated, data concerning the convalidation are to be placed in the usual columns. The date, place and assisting minister of the original ceremony are to be noted in the "Notations" column.

***Sanation***

When a marriage is sanated, the minister who submitted the petition for sanation is responsible to see that the sanation is duly noted in the Marriage Register of the parish where the marriage was originally recorded.

***RCIA Catechumens and Candidates***

Marriages of persons who are baptized or received into full communion with the Catholic Church are not to be recorded in the Marriage Register unless the marriage is now being convalidated or sanated (in which case, see above for Convalidation or Sanation). A notation concerning the marriage is to be placed in the "Notations" column of the person's baptismal record.

***Notification of Church of Baptism***

When the marriage of a Catholic is celebrated, convalidated or sanated, the pastor of the parish where the record of marriage is retained must notify the church of Baptism as soon as possible. This notification is to include the names of the spouses and the date and place of the wedding, convalidation or sanation; the names of the assisting minister and witnesses are not required. Commercial vendors sell marriage notification forms.

**PREMARITAL FILES*****Contents***

Each parish is required to maintain a file of the paper collected during the period of marriage preparation. The file typically will include prenuptial forms, questionnaires, correspondence, notes and dispensation documents. A copy of the civil license also is retained in this file.

***Location***

Ordinarily, the Premarital File for each couple should be retained by the parish where the marriage is recorded in the Marriage Register.

***Filing***

The file for each couple is to be kept in its own envelope or folder, clearly marked with the parties' names and the date of the marriage. The files should be arranged in alphabetical or chronological order and kept together in a locked file cabinet or safe.

***Retention***

The Premarital File is to be retained for sixty (60) years or until both parties have died. Expired files are to be destroyed or otherwise disposed of so that no one can gain access to them.

***Transmission of File***

If a legitimate request for a copy of the file is made by an ecclesiastical tribunal, a photostat copy of the file should be sent. The original file should remain in the parish's archive. If the photocopy of the original file is later returned, it should be destroyed.

**DEATH REGISTER****ENTRIES*****Basic Process***

For deaths when the funeral is celebrated in the parish or in the parish boundaries, the following information is to be entered into the Death Register (*Can. 1182*):

1. the legal and Christian names of the deceased person;
2. the age of the deceased person;
3. the full name of the nearest living relative;
4. the residential address of the nearest living relative;
5. the date of death; and
6. the date and place of interment.

***Source of Data***

The data needed for the Death Register is ordinarily provided by the funeral director.

***Cremation***

When the body has been cremated, no reference to the date or place of cremation is made in the Death Register. However, the fact of cremation should be noted as well as the date and place of the ashes' interment.

***Notification of  
Church of Baptism***

No notice of death needs to be sent to the church of Baptism.



## CANONS ON SACRAMENTAL RECORDS IN GENERAL

**Can. 491 §1.** A diocesan bishop is to take care that the acts and documents of the archives of cathedral, collegiate, parochial, and other churches in his territory are also diligently preserved and that inventories or catalogs are made in duplicate, one of which is to be preserved in the archive of the church and the other in the diocesan archive.

§2. A diocesan bishop is also to take care that there is an historical archive in the diocese and that documents having historical value are diligently protected and systematically ordered in it.

§3. In order to inspect or remove the acts and documents mentioned in §§1 and 2, the norms established by the diocesan bishop are to be observed.

**Can. 535 §1.** Each parish is to have parochial registers, that is, those of baptisms, marriages, deaths, and others as prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop. The pastor is to see to it that these registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved.

§2. In the Baptismal Register are also to be noted Confirmation and those things which pertain to the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, without prejudice to the prescript of *Can. 1133*, of adoption, of the reception of sacred orders, of perpetual profession made in a religious institute and of change of rite. These notations are always to be noted on a baptismal certificate.

§3. Each parish is to have its own seal. Documents regarding the canonical status of the Christian faithful and all acts which can have juridic importance are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and sealed with the parochial seal.

§4. In each parish there is to be a storage area, or archive, in which the parochial registers are protected along with letters of bishops and other documents which are to be preserved for reason of necessity or advantage. The pastor is to take care that all of these things, which are to be inspected by the diocesan bishop or his delegate at the time of visitation or at some other opportune time, do not come into the hands of outsiders.

§5. Older parochial registers are also to be carefully protected according to the prescripts of particular law.

**Can. 876.** To prove the conferral of Baptism, if prejudicial to no one, the declaration of one witness beyond all exception is sufficient or the oath of the one baptized if the person received Baptism as an adult.

**Can. 894.** To prove the conferral of Confirmation, the prescripts of *Can. 876* are to be observed.

**Can. 1541.** Unless contrary and evident arguments prove otherwise, public documents are to be trusted concerning everything which they directly and principally affirm.

**Can. 1573.** The testimony of one witness cannot produce full proof unless it concerns a qualified witness making a deposition concerning matters done *ex officio*, or unless the circumstances of things and persons suggest otherwise.

### **CANONS REGARDING BAPTISMAL RECORDS**

**Can. 296 §2 (Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches).** In the register of baptisms, a note is to be made of the ascription of the baptized persons to a determined Church *sui iuris* in accord with the norm of *Can. 37*, of the administration of chrismation with holy Myron.... These annotations are always to be reported on the baptismal certificate.

**Can. 852 §1.** The prescripts of the *Canons* on adult baptism are to be applied to all those who, no longer infants, have attained the use of reason.

**Can. 869 §2.** Those baptized in a non-Catholic ecclesial community must not be baptized conditionally unless, after an examination of the matter and the form of the words used in the conferral of Baptism and a consideration of the intention of the baptized adult and the minister of the Baptism, a serious reason exists to doubt the validity of the Baptism.

**Can. 870.** An abandoned infant or a foundling is to be baptized unless after diligent investigation the Baptism of the infant is established.

**Can. 873.** There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.

**Can. 874 §2.** A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the Baptism.

**Can. 877 §1.** The pastor of the place where the Baptism is celebrated must carefully and without delay record in the Baptismal Register the name of the baptized, with mention made of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, if any, the place and date of the conferral of Baptism, and the date and place of birth.

**Can. 877 §2.** If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother, the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks it willingly in writing or before two witnesses. Moreover, the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses proves his paternity; in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents.

§3. If it concerns an adopted child, the names of those adopting are to be inscribed and, at least if it is done in the civil records of the region, also the names of the natural parents according to the norm of §§1 and 2, with due regard for the prescripts of the conference of bishops.

**Can. 878.** If the Baptism was not administered by the pastor or in his presence, the minister of Baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which it was administered of the conferral of the Baptism, so that he records the Baptism according to the norm of *Can. 877 §1*.

**Can. 1685.** As soon as the sentence is executed, the judicial vicar must notify the local Ordinary of the place in which the marriage was celebrated. The local Ordinary must take care that the declaration of the nullity of the marriage and any possible prohibitions are noted as soon as possible in the marriage and baptismal registers.

## **CANONS REGARDING CONFIRMATION RECORDS**

**Can. 894.** To prove the conferral of Confirmation, the prescripts of *Can. 876* are to be observed.

**Can. 895.** The names of those confirmed with mention made of the minister, the parents and sponsors, and the place and date of the conferral of Confirmation are to be recorded in the Confirmation Register of the diocesan curia or, where the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop has prescribed it, in a register kept in the parish archive. The pastor must inform the pastor of the place of Baptism about the conferral of Confirmation so that a notation is made in the Baptismal Register according to the norm of *Can. 535 §2*.

**Can. 896.** If the pastor of the place was not present, the minister either personally or through another is to inform him as soon as possible of the conferral of Confirmation.

## CANONS REGARDING MARRIAGE RECORDS

**Can. 1081.** The pastor or the priest or deacon mentioned in *Can. 1079 §2* is to notify the local Ordinary immediately about a dispensation granted for the external forum; it is also to be noted in the Marriage Register.

**Can. 1121 §1.** After a marriage has been celebrated, the pastor of the place of the celebration or the person who takes his place, even if neither assisted at the marriage, is to note as soon as possible in the Marriage Register the names of the spouses, the person who assisted, and the witnesses, and the place and date of the celebration of the marriage according to the method prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop.

**Can. 1122 §1.** The contracted marriage is to be noted also in the baptismal registers in which the Baptism of the spouses has been recorded.

**Can. 1123.** Whenever a marriage is either convalidated in the external forum, declared null, or legitimately dissolved other than by death, the pastor of the place of the celebration of the marriage must be informed so that a notation is properly made in the marriage and baptismal registers.

**Can. 1685.** As soon as the sentence is executed, the judicial vicar must notify the local ordinary of the place in which the marriage was celebrated. The local ordinary must take care that the declaration of the nullity of the marriage and any possible prohibitions are noted as soon as possible in the marriage and baptismal registers.

## CANON REGARDING DEATH RECORDS

**Can. 1182.** When the burial has been completed, a record is to be made in the Death Register according to the norm of particular law.