



Sacramental Records

Caring, Handling, Repairing, and Storing Your Registers: A Guide

For further questions, comments, or concerns, please call archivist Emily Teachout or Chancellor Linda Nichols at the Diocese of Steubenville: (740)282-3631

Characteristics of Register Books:

THE PROBLEM	THE SOLUTION
<p>High Acidity and Acid Migration: When two books are near each other, acid can travel either directly or indirectly through the vapors in the environment. For example, if two books are sitting on top of one another, and one of those books is showing high levels of acidity, that acid can eventually travel to the book it is touching. It can also affect other books around it, as the acid can travel through the air. This can be destructive for both books.</p>	<p>Inspect your books for acid migration (areas of paper will appear dark and discolored). If you notice this, purchase an archival box and keep your book inside of it.</p> <p>Another option is to have the book de-acidified through a company like Preservation Technologies.</p>
<p>Brittleness: This is the chipping and cracking of paper. To check for brittle paper, fold a small corner of a page in half, then fold back to its original state. If the paper cracks off easily during this process, your register is exhibiting signs of brittleness.</p>	<p>The main tactic here is that of prevention. In other words, make sure that when you purchase new registers, they are made with acid free paper (Permalife). Also, handle brittle pages as gently as possible.</p>
<p>Poor Bindings and Boards: When the spines of books are ripping off and falling apart. This eventually leads to loose pages.</p>	<p>Never crack open books and break the binding. If the binding is already broken, call the Archives. The book may need to be rebound.</p>
<p>Acidic Ink (Iron Gall Ink): Acid from regular ink pens will eventually degrade the paper, causing fading, white spots, and holes.</p>	<p>Use black, waterproof, fade resistant, and acid free archival ink (Micron pens).</p>
<p>Red Rot: When leather books degrade due to exposure to high humidity, pollution, or high temperatures, the leather will deteriorate and become a powdery, felt-like consistency. The structure of the book will also feel more bendable and weaker.</p>	<p>Make sure books are stored in a humidity and temperature controlled environment. If possible, keep temperatures between 65-68 degrees Fahrenheit and humidity near 45%.</p>

Handling Records: Best Practices

1. Always wash your hands before touching the register books. Make sure your hands are as dry as possible, since oils from your fingers can damage records.
2. Never break the binding of a book or crack open the binding while writing in a register.
3. Do not have food, drinks, gum, or any other destructive substances near registers.
4. Registers should never be exposed to direct sunlight or fluorescent light for long periods of time. If you are recording information near a window or under fluorescent light, this is okay. However, please be conscious of the damage this can have on records and limit their exposure. Never leaving them sitting out under this lighting.
5. In general, be gentle and careful when utilizing your register books

Storing Your Records

- If possible, all register books should be placed within their own archival box. This pertains more to those records that are much older and more frail and fragile, especially books that are showing signs of high acidity. Keeping books in separate boxes will limit the spread of destructive acid and, in general, keep your books protected and well-preserved.
- A stable environment is essential for proper preservation (temperature and humidity control).
- Make sure records are stored in a fireproof vault, safe, or filing cabinet. NEVER keep records in wooden or plastic storage spaces. Steel coated or metal shelving is acceptable.
- Do not store books with their spine up or spine down. They should be kept upright or flat. If books are stored flat and stacked upon one another, try to keep the pressure as limited as possible (for example: if you have six heavy books stored on top of one another due to limited space, consider creating three columns of two books instead).
- Be sure records are stored at least three inches off the floor.
- Do not store near food or where food is prepared.
- Do not store near bathrooms.
- Do not store in attics or basements.

Repairing Your Registers

- **DO NOT** laminate records.
- **DO NOT** tape records to repair rips. If you must, use **ONLY** archival quality tape.
- **DO NOT** staple, glue, rubber band, or paperclip any notifications to paper in the registers. These substances degrade and rust over time, leaving stains and permanent damage.
- If a register is in serious need of repair, it may be outsourced for preservation. However, this process **MUST be done through the Diocesan Archive.**
- Be aware if you notice any of the characteristics mentioned previously (e.g. red rot, water damage, brittle paper, loose pages, etc.).

Recording in Registers: The Dos and Don'ts

DO	DON'T
Record entries as soon as possible after the event occurs.	Never wait to record information.
Use black, waterproof, fade resistant, and acid free archival ink.	Do not use pencil or regular ink (anything written in pencil can be written over in archival ink, when possible).
Write in print and as clearly and legibly as possible.	Avoid writing in cursive or illegibly.
Be sure to record the person's name in the index (it is preferred that the last name is written in capital letters).	Do not neglect writing a name in the index. When people call for their records, they may not know the date on which they received their sacrament. Being able to refer to their name in the index is extremely helpful and efficient.
Write down full names and write out the month instead of using its corresponding number.	Avoid any abbreviations when it comes to a person's name. Write out his/her full name. In addition, do not write the number of the month (e.g. 8 for August).
If there is a mistake, simply draw a line through it and write the correction above, below, or beside.	Never use white out to correct an error.
Record all notifications from other parishes, the Tribunal, etc., inside the register as soon as you receive the information	Never leave notifications inside a register. Once notations and all information separate from the register have been recorded, they can be destroyed. Also, avoid leaving sticky notes or any other outside documents inside the register. For example: if you have adoption paperwork, please keep this information in a separate file folder OUTSIDE of the register

Transferring Registers: What Registers Should be Transferred to the Archives?

- Closed registers recorded 70 years ago or earlier
- Any registers from closed parishes
- Closed volumes that are rarely accessed
- Brittle or damaged registers

Registers may be kept at parishes if they are still active. If the volume is closed, but still accessed frequently, it may remain at the parish.

Purchasing New Registers

When purchasing a new register book, order registers with the following qualities:

- Acid free paper (like Permalife)
- Permanent binding
- No more than 200 pages

In addition, order acid free pens (like Micron 05) for recording data.

Accessing Records

The only people accessing, handling, and recording in registers should be the priest and his designates. **No access** must ever be given to the public due to the confidential information within the registers. Genealogists, for example, should never handle the original records.

Genealogy Requests: Some Things to Consider

- Any genealogy requests you receive may be transferred to the Diocesan Archive, where we will take over the research. Please direct those requesting information to our website to fill out a genealogy form (Diosteub.org > Offices > Archive > Historical and Genealogical Research).
- Only information 70 years or older can be released to someone for genealogical purposes.
- No one outside the diocese should be microfilming or digitizing records for genealogical reasons (or any other reasons). **DO NOT** hand out or release private information.
 - Many diocesan archivists, parish secretaries, chancellors, and priests have reported being called by the Church of Latter Day Saints (LDS) who frequently offer free digitization services of sacramental records in exchange for making these records public for genealogical purposes. LDS also believe in posthumous baptism, which is not observed in Catholicism and creates a problem for our sacramental records. Therefore, you are NOT PERMITTED to release records for digitization to LDS or any other organization offering digitization. For any questions or concerns regarding this matter, please contact Linda Nichols or Emily Teachout at the Diocese.