

DIOCESE OF BUFFALO
OFFICE OF WORSHIP

Precepts for Sacramental Record Keeping

Revised November 2023

General Norms

Presented below are some general norms that pertain to sacramental registers. Additional guidelines, specific to particular registers (i.e. for a particular sacrament) are listed later in the document.

1) Types of Registers — Every parish is required to maintain records of baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and deaths. Many also maintain a register of First Communions, although this is not required by Church law.

While parishes may use computer databases or indexes to track sacramental records, the registers themselves are the only official records and must be maintained.

The registers are never destroyed or discarded, regardless of age or condition.

Recording of sacraments, and notification sent to the parish of baptism, should be done promptly in these registers according to the norms set out in Canon Law (See Canons 535, 877, 895, 1121, 1122).

Families of Parishes are not to create “consolidated registers” that would cover sacraments celebrated in multiple churches in one volume. Each parish is to have its own registers.

Faith Formation offices may wish to create certificates for individuals or keep electronic records of those formed for First Penance (a prerequisite for First Communion) but no official register for the celebration of First Penance is to be maintained.

2) Safe Storage — Sacramental registers belong to the individual parish church and 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 (i.e. in an emergency or at the request of the diocese for inspection or archival).

Registers for multiple parish churches may be kept in the parish family “hub” (or the parish office responsible for sacramental records for a Family of Parishes).

3) Access — The only persons to have access to the registers are the pastor/ administrator, parochial vicar, the vicar forane, or the pastor's designee (one charged with the responsibility for inscription, retention, and release of sacramental records).

4) Discretion with Confidential Information — Although sacramental records contain information about public events, they also contain information which is very personal and confidential. They are maintained for the good of the Christian faithful, but they are private documents, not public ones.

The person designated in the parish to have regular access to the registers must be capable of careful work and of protecting confidentiality. No information from sacramental records is to be provided over the phone or by other electronic means.

Sacramental registers are never made available to genealogical researchers.

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. The only other people who can legitimately obtain information about the reception of sacraments are:

- the parents of a minor
- one with legal guardianship of another
- a pastoral minister at another Catholic parish
- a diocesan official

If the person is deceased, the spouse or adult child may also request the record.

When the parents of a child are separated or divorced, both parents, regardless of legal custody, have the right to their child's certificate.

Once an adoption has been completed, only the adoptive parents have a right to the child's certificate (cf. Canon 110) until the child reaches the age of majority (18 years).

When agencies or other third parties request someone else's records, they must provide a release form signed by the individual whose record they are requesting. The completed release form is kept on file in case of a violation of privacy claim. The individual can also obtain his or her own certificate and provide it to the third party that is requesting it.

The most important sacramental record is that of Baptism, since it contains not only data concerning a person's baptism but also data about adoption, reception into Full Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, Holy Orders, Religious Profession, declarations of nullity, laicization, and change of rite. All of these annotations are to be noted on a baptism certificate every time one is issued.

The Baptism certificate also has value beyond strictly ecclesiastical use. For example, some persons are helped in Social Security benefit claims through presentation of an authentic record of Baptism to a public agency, since such a record will have notations with respect to date and place of birth.

It is also conceivable that a Baptism record might contain information that would be pertinent in a civil or criminal matter, and if so, the individual can obtain his or her own certificate for use in court.

When a record is sought by a third party for purposes of litigation, or, in any event, without the expressed written consent of the subject, this request is ordinarily to be declined for these reasons:

- the sacramental nature of the record,
- the proprietary right of the subject in that record,
- the very real danger that the pastor will be held liable for undue disclosure (cf. Canon 220).

5) Genealogical Requests — Our diocesan archives and parish sacramental registers exist to maintain official diocesan and parish records and documentation of official acts of the Bishop and priests, deacons, or their delegates.

As Canon 486.1 states, “All documents which regard the diocese or parishes must be protected with the greatest care.” These are internal Church documents meant to support the sacramental life of the Church.

At this time, we are not able to accept requests related to genealogy, the establishment of dual citizenship outside of the United States, or similar requests not limited to those listed here, as deemed by the Office of Worship and the Chancellor’s Office.

There simply is not enough staff to fulfill these requests, as the diocese and affiliated parishes all over have experienced staff reductions. Genealogical research cannot be our priority and these records, regardless of age, may not be made available to the public or individual researchers, regardless of the intended use.

As stated above, sacramental registers (or their contents) are never to be made available to genealogical researchers, no matter how well-intentioned.

6) Register Entries — All entries in sacramental records must be made by neat printing (rather than script) and in black ink (rather than colored and “rolling” inks). Ball-point ink lasts longer and does not wash off in case of water damage.

Economy of size in the printing is recommended because of limited space in the registers, especially in the “Notations” section, where future changes or corrections will be entered.

Entries should be made as soon as possible after the event to be recorded. The signature of the minister is no longer required. Where the name of the minister is requested, the recorder (person responsible for maintaining sacramental records) is to print the name.

Entries are to be made in chronological order. If this order cannot be kept in a 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, entry #7”).

The last name or surname is to be entered first in upper case (e.g. “JONES”), followed by the given name(s) in lower case (e.g. “William”).

Printing the name of the month is preferred to using the month’s number (e.g. “Aug.” rather than “8”).

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" or "See SMITH, page 59, entry #13").

In the case of a **mistake** during the inscription process, a single line drawn through the entire entry will invalidate the record. A new record on the next line in the register is to be inscribed.

e.g. ~~Maria Garcia, d.o.b. May 1, 2000~~
Mario Gracia, d.o.b. May 11, 2000

Correction fluid or tape ("white-out"), erasers, or other cosmetic correcting products may never be used in sacramental registers.

7) Certificates — A certificate is an official document certifying that a particular individual has received a sacrament. It is an **exact duplicate** of information already entered in a **sacramental register**, not of information stored in a computer database or index.

The one who signs the certificate (typically the pastor / rector / administrator) attests to its being an authentic copy of the original register.

Certificates of sacraments received are intended primarily for **internal church use**. They should have an official appearance and be issued in a consistent format, bearing the name and address of the parish.

They are to be typed, printed by computer, or hand printed in ink, signed by the pastor or his delegate (no rubber-stamp signatures), and impressed with the parish seal. The authorized recorder can sign the pastor's name if they add their initials and place the seal above both initials and the pastor's name.

Photos and facsimile copies of certificates are not considered to be authentic documents. With increased computer capability, parishes throughout the country are creating their own certificates by computer.

This is acceptable; however, the Baptism certificate **must** include all notations relative to reception of other sacraments (i.e. reception into Full Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, dispensation, nullity of marriage, reception of sacred orders, laicization, perpetual religious profession, change of rite).

If there is no data in the "Notations" column of the register, the words, "No Notations" should be printed on the certificate.

Before releasing a certificate, it is important to verify the identity of the person requesting the document (e.g. driver's license, passport, other photo ID., etc.). Great care should be taken not to give records indiscriminately to persons who have no legitimate right to them (See item #4 above.)

When requests come through the mail, email, or by telephone asking that a certificate be mailed to the petitioner, special care should be taken. If the person requesting the record is unable to provide proof of identity at that time or if he or she lives in another city or state, the certificate can be mailed to that person's parish, where he or she will be asked for proof of identity before receiving the certificate.

The ordinary request for a sacramental record from parish to parish or from a diocesan office (e.g. Tribunal or Chancellor's Office) presents no problem. The record is mailed directly to the parish or diocesan office, without requiring a signed release.

8) Changes to Original Entries — Once entered into a sacramental register, data is considered official and permanent. Original data should never be scratched out, erased, covered over or otherwise destroyed or obliterated.

If a **spelling or date error** is discovered in an entry, before an alteration can be made, the parish must first have legal proof of the correct information (e.g. birth certificate). Once receiving proof, the correction should be made directly in the original entry by drawing one line through the incorrectly spelled word or number and printing it correctly.

It is not permitted that any changes be made of a substantial nature without authentic proof. A notation is made in the remarks column: e.g. "information changed to agree with birth certificate." A copy of the source document from which the correction is made retained in the parish files.

A secure file marked "Sacramental Records" is to be kept in the parish files where source documentation is maintained. Such documentation would include copies of civil or court records, notarized affidavits and official correspondence which are the basis for making corrections or changes in the original entry in a sacramental register.

When the correction or change is made, the words "See Sacramental Records File" are printed in the "Notations" column of the sacramental register.

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 listings in the index, are clearly to be cross-referenced.

The words "Do not Issue Certificate from This Record" are to be printed carefully across the face of the original entry with an indication of where the revised entry is located.

Changes to an original entry that **ARE permitted** include:

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

Changes that **ARE NOT PERMITTED** include:

- new godparents or sponsors
- non-adopting stepparents
- customary name or nickname
- new legal name as a result of gender reassignment (see page 16 for full explanation)

Once specific data has been changed / corrected in the sacramental register, the original data is not transcribed onto certificates (e.g. incorrect spelling, incorrect date, former name before adoption).

9) Missing Records — 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 in the same locale, the inquirer should be encouraged to contact that other parish.

Supportive documentation to discover /re-establish a record may include:

- Photographs or a video of the event provided by the inquirer. These may be able to establish the conferral of the sacrament.
- Perhaps the parish of Confirmation has a notation in the Confirmation Register about the place and date of baptism, if the baptism record is missing.
- If there was a godparent, sponsor or witness present, a notarized affidavit submitted by that person (verifying their role, the place and date of the conferral of the sacrament, etc.). This form is available on the diocesan website: <https://www.buffalodiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BaptismAff02.pdf>. (Linked under “Resources for Clergy, Chancery Forms”)

Only that data which can be vouched for with certainty should be entered in the sacramental register, even though this may leave an incomplete entry. The name of the witness, the date of his or her affidavit, and the words, “Based on the testimony of” should be printed in the “Notations” column of the register.

Any supportive documentation that is provided is to be retained in the “Sacramental Records” file at the parish.

10) Inspection of Sacramental Registers — Every fiscal year the Vicar Forane shall make a pastoral visitation of each family of parishes/mission. During this visit, he will inspect the sacramental registers of each church for accuracy (including completion of entries). He will date and sign his name (using V.F. as his title) after the last entry of each register.

He will verify that sacramental registers are securely stored and that access is limited. He will also inspect the Mass offering book to ensure that Mass stipends are recorded and fulfilled according to canonical stipulations and diocesan policy.

10) Questions Regarding Sacramental Records — If these Guidelines do not provide adequate direction to address a particular situation, the pastor or parish recorder or other representative is to contact the Office of Worship or the Chancellor for guidance.

Additional Guidelines: Baptism Register

Making Accurate Original Entries

Where the parents of the child to be baptized are not personally known, it is recommended that those presenting the child for Baptism be asked to provide to the parish a copy of the birth certificate (or some other document verifying name of child, birth date/place, and parents' names) along with a registration form which will be helpful in generating the entry.

This ensures that the parish can verify the accuracy of the information that is to be entered into the Baptism Register. Many errors that later on have to be corrected are made because certain data was entered into the Baptism Register based purely on the word of someone else without certifying its accuracy. The birth certificate or other document can be returned to the parents once the information is verified. Inability, however, to provide documentation, in a particular case, should not be cause for denial or delay of Baptism.

Unmarried Parents

Where the parents of the child to be baptized are unmarried, the name of the mother is to be inserted in the register if there is public proof of her maternity or if she offers this willingly, either in writing or before the pastor and two witnesses.

Likewise, the name of the natural father is to be inserted if his paternity has been proven either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses.

It is prohibited to enter unauthorized names of parents in the Baptism Register.

A copy of the public proof is retained in the "Sacramental Records" file in the parish. If no public proof is available, the name of the child baptized is recorded without any indication of the name of the father or the parents. (cf. Canon 877.2)

Proving Paternity

There are four basic ways of proving paternity:

- 1) Parents are married at the time of conception.
- 2) If not married at the time of conception, but they DO marry before or after the birth of the child, at the time the couple procures the marriage license, they can complete and file an acknowledgment of paternity form. Once filed, the couple can then request an amended birth certificate from the Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics.
- 3) If the couple is NOT MARRIED and the father wants to confirm his paternity, he can file an acknowledgment of paternity form with the Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics. The mother cannot file this form on behalf of the father.
- 4) Other court action

Adoption In-Process

In circumstances of an adoption-in-process, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, in accord with the prescripts of canon 877 §3, have decreed that: "For children baptized after their adoption is finalized, the following information shall be entered in the register:

- the Christian name(s) of the child as designated by the adoptive parent(s)
- the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s)
- the date and place of birth
- the names of the sponsors selected by the adoptive parent(s)
- the place and date of the baptism
- the name of the minister performing the baptism
- the fact of adoption but not the names of the natural parents (in the notes section).

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.

Baptism Prior to Adoption

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:

- parentheses shall be placed around the names of the natural parents
- the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s) shall then be added
- the child's former surname shall also be parenthesized and the new surname added
- a notation shall be made that the child was legally adopted (in the notes section).

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 sponsors 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.

Recording Sacraments of Neophytes (RCIA/OCIA)

For the Elect who have completed the RCIA and received full initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist), the name is recorded in the Baptism Register with all pertinent information, including reception of Confirmation and Eucharist. Entries are also made in the Confirmation and First Communion Registers.

A Baptism certificate is issued which also indicates reception of Confirmation and Eucharist.

Recording Sacraments of Candidates (Adult Confirmation/Full Communion)

For a validly baptized Christian who is received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church (Profession of Faith, Confirmation, Eucharist), the name is recorded in the “Received into Full Communion Register” or, in its absence, the Baptism Register, under the date of the Profession of Faith.

All pertinent information is entered, including reception of Confirmation and Eucharist. Data, especially date and place, concerning the original baptism in the non-Catholic denomination is entered in the “Notations” section of the Baptism Register.

If applicable, also entered in the “Notations” section is data regarding the current marital status (either current valid marriage or the convalidation of the current marriage). Any declaration of invalidity from the Tribunal (including where granted and protocol number) should be noted.

Entries are also made in the Confirmation and First Communion Registers. If there was a convalidation of the current Marriage, an entry is also made in the Marriage Register. A “Reception into Full Communion” or a “Profession of Faith” certificate is issued, with all notations.

Children Baptized in Non-Catholic Churches

Periodically the situation will arise where Christian parents who have had a child baptized in a non-Catholic church want their child to become Catholic. One reason this could occur is that the parent(s) came into the Catholic Church through initiation.

Many non-Catholic Baptisms, namely those using water and the Trinitarian formula, are recognized by the Catholic Church. Those made in some ecclesial communities are not. Please consult the Office of Worship if you are unsure if the baptism is recognized.

Additionally, you may consult the chart available at <https://www.buffalodiocese.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/validity-of-baptisms-and-confirmation-1.docx>

(See Resources for Clergy, Tribunal Documents)

For children who have not yet completed their seventh year, if they have been validly baptized, their parent(s) may make a Profession of Faith on their behalf.

Once made, the information concerning the child's Profession of Faith is added to parish records in the Baptism Register. Data, especially date and place, concerning the child's original baptism in the non-Catholic denomination is entered in the "Notations" section of the Baptism Register.

Once recorded, a Profession of Faith certificate is issued to the parents, and the Catholic parish becomes the place of sacramental record for the child.

Prison Baptisms

Baptisms that occur in prisons are to be recorded according to the norms established for hospitals (above), namely, at the territorial parish within which the institution is located. Special attention should be paid to preparing incarcerated adults for full initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist) according to the RCIA (and not solely Baptism).

Baptism in Danger of Death

In the case of an individual's emergency Baptism at a hospital or other facility, the Baptism is to be recorded in the Baptism Register of the parish in which the hospital/facility is located (cf. Canon 878).

If the individual baptized was an infant, the parents should be reminded to contact their parish priest at the earliest convenience to arrange for the celebration of the "Order of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church" found in the *Order of Baptism of Children*.

If the individual baptized was an adult (anyone over the age of reason), they would also have received the sacraments of Confirmation and Eucharist. If that individual survives, they should be admitted to the RCIA/OCIA for proper accompaniment in the form of mystagogical catechesis.

The emergency Baptism may also be recorded (as a cross-reference) in the Baptism Register of the parish where the parents are registered at the time that the ritual ceremonies are supplied.

The date and place where the ritual ceremonies were supplied are indicated in the "Notations" segment of the Baptism Register. The above also applies to baptism conferred in any location outside a parish church (e.g. chapel).

Making Additions/Changes to Original Entries

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 Baptism Register. The directions for some of these changes can be found in the *General Norms* section at the beginning of these guidelines. All other changes are to be recorded in the "Notations" column.

- When a Catholic celebrates Confirmation or Holy Matrimony, the parishes where these sacraments are celebrated notify the parish of Baptism, so that the new sacraments can be noted in the Baptism Register.
- When a Catholic celebrates Holy Orders, the diocese where the candidate is incardinated will notify the parish of Baptism so that the new sacrament can be noted in the Baptism Register.
- When a Marriage is declared invalid by an ecclesiastical Tribunal or when a cleric is returned to the lay state, the Tribunal will notify the parish of Baptism so that a notation can be made in the person's Baptism record. (cf. Canon 1682 § 2)
- Information about an individual's entry into (or dismissal from) an institute of consecrated life or society of apostolic life (including Holy Orders or return to the lay state) is the responsibility of the institute or society to communicate to the parish of Baptism.

Notification documents should include a "turn around" mechanism to verify that notations have been recorded. That is, the parish of Baptism should have a means of returning the document (or a portion of it) signed by the pastor or a delegate to verify that the record has been updated in the Baptism Register.

Notification documents are available from many vendors or may be created by a parish.

Changes Regarding Apostasy or Change of Practice/Belief

Apostasy, understood as the “total repudiation of the Christian faith” (Canon 751), sometimes motivates baptized Catholics to request that their baptismal record be destroyed. The same can happen when a baptized Catholic has abandoned the practice of the faith in favor of some other ecclesial community.

While it is appropriate to indicate this change in the PDS software by changing the person’s status to “inactive” and removing their name from any mailing or membership lists, **NO deletions are to be made to the sacramental records.**

Abandoning the practice of the faith, attending another Christian ecclesial community’s services, or stating that one no longer wants to be Catholic is not sufficient for a “Formal Defection from the Catholic Church.” Once a person is baptized into the Catholic Church, he or she remains a Catholic forever. *The permanent ontological change that takes place in baptism is never lost, nor is membership in the one Church of Christ revoked.*

The notations mentioned regarding additions/changes/apostasy above 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 usually not confidential and should ordinarily be included on certificates that are issued.

Requested Changes Regarding Godparents

Occasionally, a parish will receive the request by a parent to change or delete the name of a godparent from the Baptism Register because the parent has had a falling out with the godparent, or because the godparent has left the Church or is no longer living a moral life.

It must be explained to the parent that the Baptism Register records an historical event, and the godparent was physically present and was also a witness to the sacrament, and, thus, that person’s name cannot be deleted.

In addition, canon law requires only one godparent. If the other godparent can continue to help the child lead a Christian life, then there is no need to add a substitute godparent. If both godparents are no longer acceptable or have died before the child’s eighteenth birthday and the parents insist on adding another person to fulfill the role of godparent, the name of that other person may be added in the “Notations” section.

No change may be made in the original entry or on the baptism certificate.

Requested Changes for Immigration Purposes

At times parishes receive requests to change the baptism records or completely falsify a record for immigration purposes. According to U.S. Immigration law, such action on behalf of immigrants violates several federal statutes and felony crimes.

- The U.S. government does accept Church records as authentic documents.
- To falsify such records threatens those who depend on the baptism record as their claim to U.S. citizenship and presents legal risks for the pastor of the parish.
- No changes to an existing record are to be made without legitimate documentation to support the change.

Requested Changes due to "Gender Reassignment"

At the end of calendar year 2002, the Vatican Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith requested that a clarification be sent to parishes regarding persons who have had "sex change operations, who change their name to reflect their "new" sex/identity, and then request a change in their baptism record to reflect their new name. The Congregation stated that the Baptism record **may NOT be changed to the new name.**

The Oct. 15, 2002 letter from the USCCB in which the information from the Congregation was relayed states:

"...Even in cases of such operations the records are not to be altered. Specifically, the altered condition of a member of the faithful under civil law does not change one's canonical condition which is male or female as determined at the moment of birth. However, should a situation rise in which some sort of notation is determined to be necessary, it is possible, in the margin of the entry for Baptism, to note the altered status of the person under civil law. In such case, the date and relevant protocol number of the civil juridic act or document should be included along with, where possible, a copy of the documentation itself at that page of the Baptismal Registry."

Additional Guidelines: Confirmation Register

Confirmation Under Normal Circumstances

For Confirmation conferred by the Bishop or his delegate in the teenage/high school years, the entries are made in the Confirmation Register of the parish **where the sacrament takes place**.

A Confirmation certificate may be issued to each of the *Confirmandi*.

The parish to which the individual belongs or the parish that has formed them for the sacrament is responsible for sending a notification to the parish of Baptism. Or, if the individual received Confirmation and Baptism in the same parish, the recorder of that parish is responsible for noting the reception of the sacrament in the Baptism Register.

If someone other than the diocesan bishop (who is the original/ordinary minister of Confirmation) celebrates the Confirmation (e.g. the Vicar General or Vicar Forane), a marginal notation should be made indicating what authorization the celebrant had. This information can be obtained from the celebrant himself or from the Office of Worship.

Confirmation as a Family of Parishes

Whether in a Family of Parishes or a grouping of Families of Parishes in a Vicariate or in the case of a diocesan Confirmation at the Cathedral, the recorder of the parish **where the sacrament was celebrated** will enter a record into the Confirmation Register of that parish that records all who are confirmed by the Bishop or his delegate.

The individual parishes in the Family of Parishes will be responsible for:

- entering the information in the member record of the Parish Data System (PDS) software, including date celebrated, location, minister, etc.
- issuing a Confirmation certificate to each of their *Confirmandi* (with a notation of the parish where the Confirmation took place)
- notifying the parish of Baptism of each of their *Confirmandi*, if that is different.

The sacramental register will reflect accurately the historical location, date and ministration of the sacrament, according to proper canonical requirements, while the electronic member record will aid each individual parish in reflecting its own statistics and sacramental life.

Please note that each parish in a family of parishes is to maintain its own distinct sacramental registers. They are not to consolidate or create a set of “family” sacramental registers.

RCIA/OCIA

For the Elect who have completed the RCIA and received full initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist), the Confirmation is recorded in the Confirmation Register, in addition to the record created in the Baptismal Register.

Likewise, for a validly baptized Christian who is received into Full Communion with the Catholic Church (Profession of Faith, Confirmation, Eucharist), the Confirmation is also recorded in the Confirmation Register in addition to the record created in the Baptismal Register/Reception into Full Communion Register.

If a candidate chooses to be Baptized and/or Confirmed at another parish (for instance at the Cathedral, with the Bishop as minister or at another parish within their Family of Parishes), the sacraments will be recorded in the proper registers of the parish where the sacrament(s) are celebrated.

The individual's parish of membership should then enter the sacramental information in the member record of the Parish Data System (PDS) software including date celebrated, location, minister, etc.

Baptized, Uncatechized Catholics

For those already baptized in the Catholic Church but who may be receiving Confirmation as an adult (over age 18), in order to satisfy the obligation of notifying the parish of baptism about the conferral of Confirmation, a Baptism certificate for each candidate should be obtained in advance of the celebration of Confirmation.

It is recommended that the parish and date of baptism be noted in the Confirmation Register in all of the above situations. (This can be especially helpful if a person has difficulty locating a baptismal record later in life.)

Emergency Confirmations

As in the case of an emergency Baptism, the record of an emergency Confirmation is kept in the territorial parish in which the Confirmation occurred. The territorial parish is responsible for notifying the parish of Baptism.

Importance of Confirmation Records

Proof that Confirmation was conferred is required for the reception of Holy Orders; it is also strongly recommended (cf. Canon 1065), though not required, prior to the celebration of Matrimony. It is also necessary to establish that a person was Confirmed in order for him or her to serve as a godparent or sponsor for Baptism, Confirmation, or the RCIA since full initiation (Baptism, First Eucharist, Confirmation) is a requirement. (See Canon 874 §1, 3°)

Additional Guidelines: Marriage Register

Making Accurate Original Entries

The information in the prenuptial file of the couple being prepared for Holy Matrimony is the source for the entry in the Marriage Register. This may include items in the Premarital Investigation Book as well as other relevant documents obtained during the course of the couple's formation for the sacrament.

The "Notations" column in the Marriage Register is for the purpose of noting any permission or dispensation and other significant factors (e.g. delegation of the officiant, declaration of nullity).

Permission/Dispensation

When a permission or dispensation is granted the entry will include the date, diocese, protocol number, and the type of permission/dispensation (e.g. "Dispensation from Disparity of Cult").

Annulment

When a marriage has been declared to have been null, the entry of that marriage is to include the word "Annulment" and the date, diocese granting it, and protocol number. (cf. Canon 1682 § 2)

Convalidation of a Civil Union

When a civil union is convalidated in the Catholic Church, the data concerning the convalidation are to be placed in the usual columns of the Marriage Register. In the "Notations" column is entered the date, place, and officiant of the original ceremony (e.g. the civil ceremony).

A convalidation is entered into the Marriage Register as a new Marriage because the Church does not recognize the civil ceremony as sufficient to contract marriage. Thus, the convalidation is not understood as a "Blessing" of a previously invalid union.

Notification of Marriage

After the marriage of a Catholic is celebrated, a notification must be sent to the parish of Baptism, including the names of the spouses, the priest or deacon witnessing the marriage, the date and place of the wedding or convalidation, and also notations about a permission/ dispensation or an annulment granted. (See Canons 1122, 1123)

Additional Guidelines: The Sacraments of Healing

Sacrament of Penance and First Reconciliation

Records of the Sacrament of Penance, even in the case of First Reconciliation, are never to be made or kept, nor are they required. Canon 983 speaks of the inviolable nature of the sacramental seal. Catechists and others responsible for formation may make note of the proper formation for the sacrament having been completed, however not the actual celebration of the sacrament.

Anointing of the Sick

While it may be a worthy pastoral practice to maintain a so-called "Sick Call Register," available from a number of sources, it is not a requirement of the Church. Information regarding the celebration of the Sacrament of Penance is not to be recorded in any way if a parish pastoral team chooses to track home, hospital/medical facility visits in this or a similar manner.

Utilizing Electronic Sacramental Entries

Methodology for Statistical Reporting

While not required by canon law, the use of proper, regular electronic entries of sacraments in the Parish Data System (PDS) software will aid in the accurate statistical reporting of the sacramental life of each parish.

If, for example, a family of parishes has four churches and the family desires to celebrate a common Easter Vigil and only one of the church buildings is large enough to accommodate that celebration, all the sacraments celebrated would be recorded in the parish register of that church. However, those receiving the sacrament may belong to one of the other three churches.

- To fulfill the requirements of canon law, the sacramental register of the parish hosting the Easter Vigil would record the respective Baptisms, Confirmations, First Communion and Professions of Faith in the registers affiliated with that church.
- In order to capture and to properly reflect the sacramental life of each parish, electronic entries should be made in the member information screen for each individual.
- As the statistical year closes, each parish church should run the “Member Statistical Information” report in PDS to ascertain the sacramental activity of the parish, regardless of where the sacrament was celebrated.

Duplicate entries regarding the sacrament(s) celebrated should not be made in registers where the sacrament(s) did not take place. This applies to any sacrament (Baptism, Confirmation, etc.)

Electronic Record Retention

Please keep in mind that it has been a longstanding diocesan policy that when an individual/family leaves a parish for any reason (even death), their record is never to be deleted from PDS. Rather it is to simply be marked as “Inactive.” This will ensure a retention of the sacramental information added as above not only for the short term but for future cases when an individual may be seeking records at a later date in life.

Making Proper Electronic Entries in PDS

After the celebration of a sacrament, it should be properly recorded in the sacramental register of the church **where it was celebrated**, according to the norms already given.

If an individual's parish of membership differs from the parish where the sacrament was celebrated, the sacramental recorder of the individual's **parish of membership** should ensure that the sacrament is electronically recorded in PDS with all pertinent information. This captures both the location of the sacrament (in that parish's register) and allows for a cross-reference that accurately reflects the statistical activity of the sacramental life of the individual's parish of membership.

To make a sacramental entry in PDS:

- 1) Click Sacraments
- 2) Select the proper sacrament tab (e.g. below Confirmation).
- 3) Enter all pertinent information including date, status (set to Yes if the date is certain), location, minister, sponsor(s) and click Save.

The screenshot displays the PDS interface for entering a Confirmation record. The main window is titled "Parish Data System - Church Office". The left sidebar contains navigation options such as "Member Overview", "Personal", "Communication", "Sacraments", "Ministries/Talents", "Attendance", "Safe Environment", "Letters, Visits, Etc.", "Individual Letter Label", "Reassign/Copy Member", "Memorial", "Listing Screen", "Easy Lists", "Reports", "Quick Emails / Text Msgs.", "Quick Posting Processes", and "Exit Program". The "Sacraments" tab is selected, and the "Confirm" sub-tab is active. The form fields include: Family (Test, Test, Rev. ID: 160), Name (Test, Test, Rev.), Mem ID/Envr (with an "Avail?" button), Confirmation Name (Francis), Date (10/04/2023), Status (Yes), Performed by (Most Rev. Michael W. Fisher), Place (St Gregory the Great), Address (200 St Gregory Court, Williamsville, NY 14221), and Diocese / Archdiocese (Buffalo). There are checkboxes for "Verified", "Certificate on File", "Notification Received", "Use Saint Name", "Conf. Letter Sent", "Sent to Monsignor", and "Volunteer Hours Met". A "Notes" section is present with radio buttons for "General" and "Confidential". A table at the bottom lists the sponsor/witness information:

Use Mem	Sponsor / Witness Name	Type	Address	City/State	ZIP/Postal	Phone
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ms. Jane Sponsor	Confirmation Sp...	123 Main St.	Buffalo	14203	

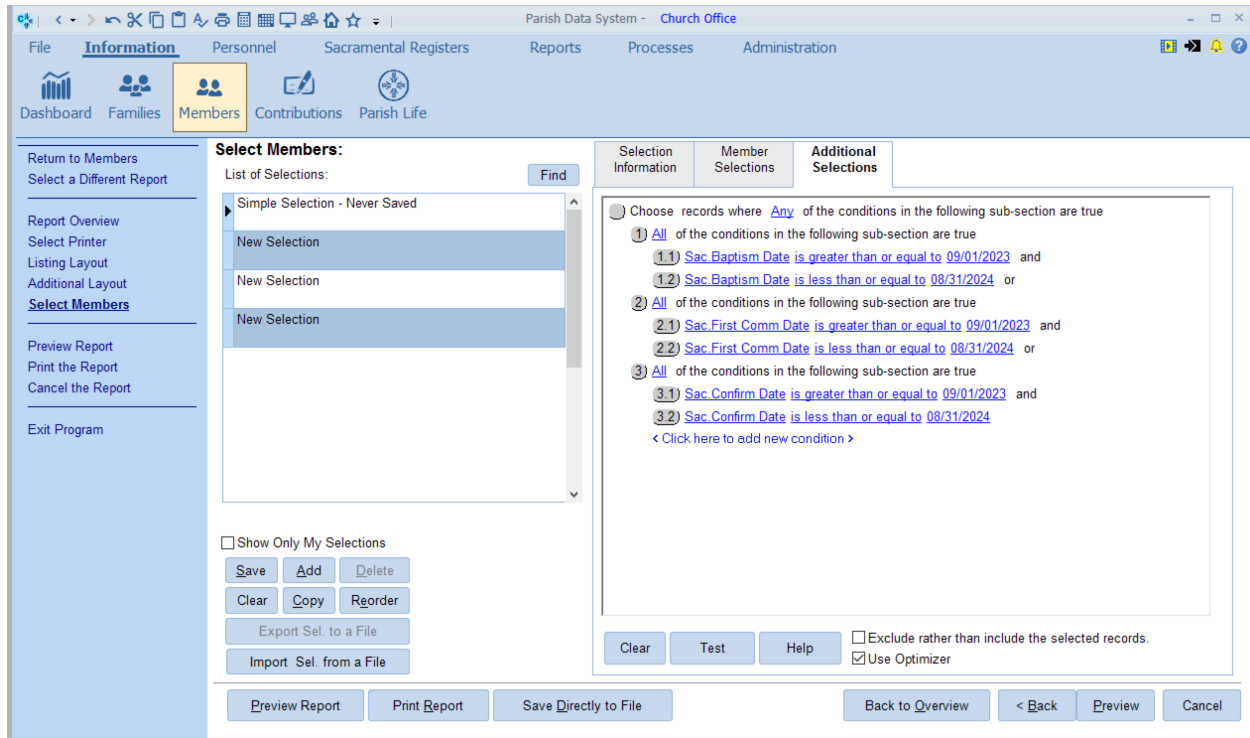
Buttons for "Print Certificate" and "Delete Confirm" are located at the bottom of the form. The status bar at the bottom right indicates "Screen Changed: 08/28/2023".

Parish locations may be added by clicking "Add" which may be helpful for frequently used parishes (i.e. others in the family of parishes).

Running a Sacramental Statistical Report in PDS

At the end of the statistical year, to easily report the number of sacraments celebrated in a parish of membership (i.e. for diocesan reports), choose the “Member Statistical Information” report found in Member Reports > Listing Reports.

Before running the report, be sure to select the member statistics based on sacramental dates for the time period desired (see below; query will be electronically shared).



The resulting report will break down the ages, genders and sacraments celebrated for the date range entered if the information has been properly entered.

Totals may easily be transcribed to diocesan reports requesting the information.

Member Statistical Information						
Age Ranges	Male	Female	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Total	Percentage
0 to 2 Years					0	0.00 %
3 to 5 Years					0	0.00 %
6 to 12 Years					0	0.00 %
13 to 18 Years	1		1		1	100.00 %
19 to 25 Years					0	0.00 %
26 to 35 Years					0	0.00 %
36 to 45 Years					0	0.00 %
46 to 55 Years					0	0.00 %
56 to 65 Years					0	0.00 %
Over 66 Years					0	0.00 %
Unknown Date					0	0.00 %
Total Age Ranges	1		1		1	100.00 %
Average/Median Ages	Male	Female	Catholic	Non-Catholic	All	
Average Ages	16	0	16	0	16	
Median Age	16		16		16	
Date Code Y - Yes	Male	Female	Catholic	Non-Catholic	Total	Percentage
1st Comm					0	0.00 %
Baptism					0	0.00 %
Confirm	1		1		1	100.00 %
Deceased					0	0.00 %
First Comm					0	0.00 %
Marriage					0	0.00 %
Penance					0	0.00 %
Reconcil					0	0.00 %
Total Date Code Y - Yes	1		1		1	100.00 %

Index of Topics

General Norms

1) Types of Registers	1
2) Safe Storage	2
3) Access	2
4) Discretion with Confidential Information	2-3
5) Genealogical Requests	4
6) Register Entries	4-5
7) Certificates	5-6
8) Changes to Original Entries	6-7
9) Missing Records	7-8
10) Inspection of Sacramental Registers	8

Additional Guidelines: Baptism Register

Making Accurate Original Entries	9
Unmarried Parents	9
Proving Paternity	10
Adoption In-Process	10
Baptism Prior to Adoption	11
Recording Sacraments of Neophytes (RCIA)	11
Recording Sacraments of Candidates (Adult Confirmation/Full Communion)	12
Children Baptized in Non-Catholic Churches	12-13
Prison Baptisms	13
Baptism in Danger of Death	13
Making Additions/Changes to Original Entries	14
Changes Regarding Apostasy or Change of Practice/Belief	15
Requested Changes Regarding Godparents	15
Requested Changes for Immigration Purposes	16
Requested Changes due to "Gender Reassignment"	16

Index of Topics (continued)

Additional Guidelines: Confirmation Register	
Confirmation Under Normal Circumstances	17
Confirmation as a Family of Parishes	17
RCIA/OCIA	18
Baptized, Uncatechized Catholics	18
Emergency Confirmations	18
Importance of Confirmation Records	19
Additional Guidelines: Marriage Register	
Making Accurate Original Entries	19
Permission/Dispensation	19
Annulment	19
Convalidation of a Civil Union	19
Notification of Marriage	20
Additional Guidelines: The Sacraments of Healing	
Sacrament of Penance and First Reconciliation	20
Anointing of the Sick	20
Utilizing Electronic Sacramental Entries	
Methodology for Statistical Reporting	21
Electronic Record Retention	21
Making Proper Electronic Entries in PDS	22
Running a Sacramental Statistical Report in PDS	23