

Records and Archives Management Handbook for Parishes and Church Organisations



'The continuing influx of paper is never ending'. We are faced daily with the problems of what to keep, how and where to store records, what to discard and when. This manual is designed to offer assistance to ministers, office-bearers and members throughout the Presbyterian Church who have records management problems and decisions to make.

1.00 What is Records Management?

The guiding principle of records management is to ensure that information is available when and where it is needed, in an organised and efficient manner, and in a suitably maintained environment.

A church records management program strives to achieve economy and efficiency in the creation, use, maintenance, and disposal of church records. Its basic purpose is to help answer that nagging question of what do I keep, for how long do I keep it and when can I remove it from my office.

A Records Management Programme identifies, maintains, safeguards, and properly disposes of useful and vital records from all the committees and groups formed within our Presbyteries and parishes.

Good records management is good stewardship and establishes a healthy ministry at parish and presbytery level.

1.20 Who is responsible for ensuring good records management in the parish and presbytery?

It is a responsibility shared by ministers, church workers, office bearers and members.

We all create and accumulate records in the roles we hold within our parish and presbytery work. In our churches or presbyteries the records we create prove our groups existence and confirm the function and activity delegated to us. The papers that accumulate record the commitment, obligations, activities and legal requirements as a congregation, or associated organisation or presbytery, and as a member or employee.

The PCANZ do not have specific regulations laid down in its *Book of Order* as to who is responsible for the oversight of records management at parish or presbytery level. However, it is important to note that the *Book of Order* states in clauses 63, 113 and 140 that:

The Clerk [of Session, Deacons' Court or Board of Managers or Presbytery] keeps minutes of the proceedings and takes charge of books, papers and documents pertaining to the office.

It is therefore, important that some discussion take place among the office-bearers to ensure a standardised records management procedure is followed within the parish courts or Parish Council and its committees. It is also helpful to formulate an overall policy for the oversight of the entire parish records and archives. (see below)

1.30 What are the benefits of good records management?

- ❖ Protection of confidentiality
- ❖ A means of ensuring compliance with legal, fiscal and administrative requirements
- ❖ Protect the interests of employees
- ❖ Faster retrieval of information for those people who work with the records
- ❖ Know what records they have, and locate them easily
- ❖ Increase efficiency and effectiveness
- ❖ Support decision making
- ❖ Provide continuity in the event of a disaster
- ❖ Fewer lost or misplaced records
- ❖ Control of the records for the period of its life
- ❖ Protection of the parish or presbytery's important and historical records
- ❖ Good management can save space