

5.00 Organisation of Records and Files (see for further assistance, *Parish Handbook a quick reference guide to Presbyterian Church regulations and procedures*, published by the Synod of Otago and Southland 2002)

"Thorough and well-kept church records are hard work, but they also can help bring order to the world of Christian ministry and serve as a valuable tool for the leader's task."

"Record keeping forms the knowledge base for informed planning." (John W. Ellas, *Church Growth* 12 :3. 1997)

Parish courts and organisations, and Presbyteries must ensure that their records are:

Authentic

It must be possible to prove that records are what they purport to be and have evidence as to who created them, by keeping a record of their management through time.

Accurate

Records must accurately reflect the transactions that they document.

Accessible

Records must be readily available when needed.

Complete

Records must be sufficient in content, context and structure to reconstruct the relevant activities and transactions that they document.

Comprehensive

Records must document the complete range of the business of the various courts and organisations of the parish.

Compliant

Records must comply with any record keeping requirements resulting from legislation, audit rules and other relevant regulations such as those found for financial record keeping, and information that may fall under the Privacy Act.

Effective

Records must be maintained for specific purposes and the information contained in them must meet those purposes.

Secure

Records must be securely maintained to prevent unauthorised access, alteration, damage or removal. They must be stored in a secure environment, the degree of security reflecting the sensitivity and importance of the contents. If electronic

records are migrated across changes in technology, it is imperative that the documents retain accuracy and authenticity. (National Archives of Scotland)

5.1 Filing Systems:

Each Moderator, Clerk, Committee Convener will have created a filing system over time. Each new encumbant will have amended this previous system or changed it completely. We have no official guidelines how or why a file should be kept and what requires to be retained in it. As a consequence everything to do with whatever is being created is placed in a file and labelled with a title that may or may not purport to be what it contains. This can often cause confusion for those attempting to retrieve information. For ease of access and retrieval it is important that consistency exists and a standardised and uniform approach is developed within each set of group/committee records.

What are Files:

(1) An organised unit of documents, accumulated during current use and kept together because they deal with the same subject, activity or transaction and which may or may not be fastened together with or without a cover. *Ellis (ed), Keeping Archives, p. 462*

(2) A complete, named collection of information, such as a program, a set of data used by a program, or user-created document. A file is the basic unit of storage that enables a computer to distinguish one set of information from another. A file might or might not be stored in human-readable form, but it is still the "glue" that binds a conglomeration of instructions, numbers, words, or images into a coherent unit that a user can retrieve, change, delete, save or send to an output device. *Ellis (ed), Keeping Archives, p.470*

(3) A file contains a collection of documents which show a committee or Presbytery's activities through an identifiable sequence of activities. This evidence forms an important part of a good record keeping system and promotes and supports an organisation's accountability and efficiency.

NSW State Records Office

5.2 Intellectual Control of a filing system

It is important to think about how we create files because of the significance of the material held in the file and because we require to access it at a later time. Therefore thought needs to be given to how we arrange and label the files and the placement of them in our day to day filing cabinets.

1) Choices to be made include:

- whether file categories should be used
- what type of numbering system will be most effective

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- how will registration of records be handled, with a manual system or records management software
- what type of classification system will be most effective
- how will documents be attached to files, and
- whether file numbering is required.

2) *Placing files in categories can bring a number of benefits:*

- files are organised into logical groups which relate to the functions and activities of the work each designated group is undertaking
- policy files are identified
- disposal of files is more easily managed.

3) *However categorising files can also have a number of disadvantages:*

- it can add an unnecessary level of complication to the file numbering system if numbering is to be used
- it can add an unnecessary and confusing level of control where a keyword system is used
- where file categories are based on organisational structure, reorganisations will make file categories out of date and their value will be lost
- where file categories are based on functions the categories will be similarly affected by changes in the organisation's functions or the terminology used to describe them.

It is important that what we decide is simple, yet clearly defines the policy, administrative, and functional activities of the work we do.

1) *Policy*

This category contains those files which document the organisation's policy on any matter. These files document the development of policy in any of the organisation's jurisdictions or functions.

2) *Administrative*

This category contains the files which relate to the day-to-day administrative activities of the organisation. It includes routine, housekeeping matters such as meeting times and appointments, establishment files.

3) *Functions*

This category contains the files which relate to the specific functions which the designated groups were established to perform. These functions may be defined by regulations, articles of incorporation, organisational structure, or business plans. Functions delineate and describe the *activities* which produce *records*. The choice of functional categories should be made on the basis of what best serves the needs of the designated group. These categories should reflect the way in which the each group operates.

5.3 Organising Files

The organization of records and files should be kept simple and direct. Use the rule of thumb that the arrangement should be quickly understood by another person who could take over the position of Clerk/Secretary/Moderator.

It is important to think about how to create files to highlight the significance of the material contained in them. Therefore thought needs to be given to how we arrange and label the files and the placement of them in filing cabinets for ready access in day to day use.

What is decided needs to be simple, yet will clearly define the policy, administrative, and functional activities of the work each person or group undertakes. The functions and responsibilities of a designated office can be classified into subjects or arranged into identifiable groups of records e.g.

Financial/Accounting Records:

- Payables and Receivables
- Account Balancing
- Funds and Investments Management
- Books of Permanent Entry
- Budgetary Planning
- Financial Reporting
- Payroll and Benefits/Tax
- Stewardship/Fund Raising
- Contracts and Agreements
- Bequests and Trusts

5.4 Naming Files:

Properly naming a file is an elementary rule. Documents, reports, minutes, account books and folders should have labels with titles and dates. Standardize the way that headings are assigned to folders, using common (i.e. memorable) keywords that will come to mind a year or more later.

5.5 Labelling assists in:

- faster identification and retrieval of records
- fuller intellectual control of created records
- assists new employees
- reduces risk of misfiling
- it assists in the identification of vital files

A label requires having on it:

- Name of Parish
- Name of Parish Court or Organisation
- File title
- Consecutive number if applicable
- Disposal details
- related file if applicable
- any instructions to file users
- any restricted access notes. **(See Access Policies)**

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The labelling format can either be copied and each file has it glued onto the outside or it or better still commercial printing of the label to standardise them across the General Assembly administrative groups.

The label could have a series record number printed and then sub category numbers left to be added.

Example of a label:

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa NZ	
Parish:	St. George's, Georgetown
Group:	Session
Creator:	Session Clerk
Subject File:	Elders' Retreat
Disposal Details:	retain for 5 years – then Archive
Instructions:	File is organised by date from the earliest to the latest
RESTRICTED ACCESS:	Nil
Date of Release:	
Written Permission for Access from:	

5.6 Attaching records to a file

The Archivist strongly recommends the use of plastic paper clips where documents are to be kept together. *Staples, pins, and metal fasteners rust.*

5.7 Some Tips for Improved Filing

- File regularly. Set aside time weekly or monthly to keep the "paper monster" in control.
- Weed out duplicate copies
- Do not fill folders beyond their capacity, normally one-half to three-fourths of an inch
- If the materials from a committee or organization occupy more than one folder, divide the files into other categories for arrangement. For example, the first folder may contain minutes, the second correspondence, the third reports and so on. Start a new folder for each category as needed and label as Part #1, Part #2 etc.

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- Keep personal material and resource material (e.g. catalogues, copies of articles, pamphlets etc.) separate from official records
- When placing records in files, put the latest record on top. Place the top of the sheet toward the left of the file drawer, so folder contents can be read like a book. Keep records completely within folders to avoid damage and to keep file folder labels visible.
- Close files and begin new ones at the beginning of each fiscal year or program year.
- Copy documents that are on fax paper or newsprint onto high quality paper as these papers deteriorate.
- The overall appearance of a file system plays a large part in the rapid retrieval of material. Guides and labels should be positioned consistently. Care should be taken to use the same format when generating new labels and guides.

Since members are the lifeblood of congregational life, important records are often kept away from the Church. Our office-bearers need to be encouraged to retain as few records as possible in their private homes. It is especially important that all records be handed over to the new office-bearers when they have completed their term in office.