



## A Brief Guide for Archives Management in the Parish

Our parish archives are valuable and delicate documents:

- they are strands of memory
- they are collective memory
- they help us converse with our Presbyterian past
- they convey visions
- they tell of hope
- they tell us about the progression of faith in the community
- they act as reminders where we have erred
- they are important in charting a future of Christian witness

The primary responsibility for a parish archives belongs to the congregation. Archives are the collective memory of our Congregations and the Presbyterian Church. In order to preserve the entire history of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, well maintained and accessible archives are needed in each parish.

- our parish archives are part of the story of a wider faith journey.
- our parish faith journeys are connected;
- they require to be viewed in relationship to each another;

Our parish archives stand together with the other archives of the whole church as a resource for New Zealand Presbyterian history and as evidence for the wider history of Christian life and mission in the world.

### **Appoint an Archivist or Archives Committee:**

The most effective way to ensure that records are gathered together to receive the care they require for long-term access is to appoint an archivist or archives Committee. For

those who enjoy history and the study of society and culture caring for the parish's archival treasure (taonga) is not only fun but a 'ministry'. An archivist is not necessarily the historian or interpreter of the congregation's history, however.

### **Some tasks and Archivist or Archives Committee should undertake:**

- The archivist should work in close cooperation with those parish courts and organisation creating records. For out of today's records will come tomorrow's parish history.
- Compile a list of records that are considered the main collection. They are best grouped according to the parish structure e.g. Session, Board of Managers, Women's organisations – PWMU, APW etc. \*\*
- Note the type of records and the date it covers e.g. Marriage Register 4/1927-3/1940; Session Minute Book 1/1919-6/1945; etc listing the dates of each volume separately.
- If there is damage, make a brief note about the nature and extent of it.
- Note the location of each item. (This will reduce the chance of any losses occurring)
- List photographs with title and dates.
- List artefacts and note any blemish or damage.
- Ascertain what is not among the records which is highly significant eg Session Minute Books or Marriage Registers
- Thoroughly search out any records stored away from the main parish collection – church cupboards, private homes, especially former office-bearers.
- Advertise in the parish newsletter and consult long standing members.
- Most of all enjoy!

The parish archivist is not directly involved with the records until they no longer have any day-to-day use. At certain times, perhaps annually, the parish archivist should collect those records that are complete and place them in the parish archives; the end of the financial year could be an ideal time to gather them up.

*\*\* Please forward list of Archives to the Director of Archives to be included in the Presbyterian National Register of Archives.*

### **Storage:**

The proper preservation of archives is as important as collecting them. The archives should be located in a locked, fireproof room, area, or filing cabinet that is least affected by extremes of light, heat, dryness or humidity.

Records should not be stored in areas subject to extreme heat, marked fluctuations in temperature, or high humidity, such as under a corrugated roof, or old refrigerators. NO PLASTIC BAGS! Papers should be periodically inspected for atmospheric and vermin damage and adequate protective measures taken.

## **Insects Pests and Mould**

Particular care should be taken to check for the presence of mould and insects pests such as borer and silverfish as they have a devastating effect on records and archives by eating into them. Most of our parish buildings are old and the spores of these insects will be present in the woodwork, walls and floor.

*It helps if an archivist is a little paranoid!* The archives should never be loaned without a close supervision. Experience tells us that if they are removed they will seldom find their way back. Parish archives are not like library books that can be loaned out!

## **What Should Be Preserved:**

1. Membership lists, transfers and additions.
2. The parish registers recording baptisms, communion, marriages, worship, and burials if maintained.
3. The minutes of the meetings of the congregation, Session, Board of Managers, parish committees, and organizations.
4. An annual list of all the names of officers and members of boards and committees.
5. All official correspondence (i.e. concerning congregational matters and any personal papers that involve discipline, appeals or commissions).
6. Copies of Annual Reports of the Congregation and all parish organisations.
7. Copies of all calls extended to ministers and appointments to teachers and other servants of the church that are accepted by them.
8. Printed materials including the Sunday bulletins, congregational newsletters, pastoral letters, orders of worship, and programs for special events.
9. The non-current treasurers' records, such as general ledgers and annual reports.
10. Copies of the deeds and descriptions of the church properties, titles, leases, surveys, etc.
11. All contracts for the construction of congregational buildings, and facilities, as well as contracts negotiated for special services. All plans, specifications, blueprints, and drawings should be included.
12. Mortgages should be retained even after they have been discharged.
13. Photographs or other graphic depictions of the congregation's building(s), ministers, organizations, activities, and events.
14. Other media items: sound or video recordings of worship services, special events, musical presentations, and activities.
15. Histories of the congregation and papers relating to historical anniversaries.



**Additional materials created by, for, or about the congregation provide further documentary evidence and also should be preserved:**

1. Source materials, such as original returns of surveys or questionnaires.
2. Statistical and comparative summaries on finance, attendance, and membership, particularly copies of reports submitted to the Presbytery.
3. Local newspaper articles or histories that include information on the congregation.
4. A chronological account of the major events and activities of a congregation.
5. Unpublished studies, theses or dissertations about the congregation by students or other researchers.
6. Biographical information gathered from various resources on persons from the congregation.
7. Certificates such as Temperance, Sunday School Attendance, Long Service, Youth Organisations, Illuminated Addresses, etc.

**Storing and caring for Archives:**

- Sellotape should **never** be used on archival records.
- Use PVA type glues not gum glues as they will eventually loose their stick, come off and leave a 'yukky' yellow stain.
- Tape already found on records should be carefully removed, but only if it is ready to come off easily, as should steel paper clips, staples, and rubber bands. All these fixing agents deteriorate and can cause irreparable damage to paper.
- Documents should not be marked with permanent ink. If any marks are made for identification purposes, pencils must be used.
- All papers should be unfolded.
- Leave plans and other items rolled up if that is how they have been stored.
- Do not unroll a photograph as it will crack.
- Archival materials should be placed into archival friendly folders or envelopes made of acid-free paper. If open shelves are being used, folders are then placed into suitable wax-lined boxes. Contact the Presbyterian Archives for suppliers of Archival material and boxes.
- Oversize materials, such as blueprints, photographs, and other large items should be stored flat.
- Volumes in good condition are best stored upright and oversized volumes stored flat.
- All folders and boxes should be labelled.
- All newspaper clippings and photographs should be identified and dated.
- Nothing should be pasted into scrapbooks.
- Series of Sunday bulletins and newsletters



may be bound for convenience and security.

- Blueprints and other oversized documents should not be folded but carefully rolled around a tube.
- Photographs, negatives, slides, audio and video recordings and artifacts should all be filed separately from paper documents. Negatives should be stored separately from associated prints.
- Archives should be stored at least fifteen centimetres off the floor – higher if possible.

### **Use of Records and Archives**

In order to reduce the possibility of the occurrence of accidental damage to records and archives while they are in use it is wise to follow some precautions:

- Hands should always be clean and dry.
- Keep fingers off prints and the surface of photographs.
- Keep records out of the reach of children.
- Leave nothing in the proximity to records that is likely to spill or leave marks such as food and drink, ink etc.
- Do not lick fingers to facilitate the turning of pages. A finger stall is useful.
- Do not write on paper placed on top of documents, registers, photographs etc.
- Always use pencil.
- Place records flat when in use.
- Researchers should always have some supervision.
- Archives and records must not be left in the sunlight.
- Watch fluorescent lighting as it also fades paper if left out for a time.



Serious consideration should be given to depositing parish archives in the Regional Repository. Refer to the Presbyterian Church Year Book for your officially approved Repository but contact the Presbyterian Archives first to ascertain the status of the Repository. Depositing archives in a Repository would provide better preservation than a local parish could give and would also make the records more readily available to a wider base of researchers. Such a transfer would not relieve the parish archivist of their responsibility for collecting and initially preserving the records of the parish.

## Electronic Records

Professional archivists have just begun to tackle the problem of preservation and accessibility of electronic or machine readable records. Currently, common electronic record storage media, that is, computer tapes and disks, are susceptible to damage and cannot be considered permanent. New computer technologies may bring some answers to long-term archival needs. But new technologies may create another problem, which is accessibility of records with outdated or absent software or hardware. Therefore, to maintain records in an electronic form, a commitment must be made to update

continually and convert all records to the newest formats, disks or tapes



### **What is Electronic Records Management?**

A lot of mystique has built up surrounding electronic records management and what it involves. The management of documents we create electronically require the same sound records management principles applied to them as our paper records. The risks of not controlling electronic records are similar but different to those risks of not controlling our

paper/hard copy records.

Managing our electronic records on the computer is not a "quick fix". It cannot be seen as a technological solution to the reduction of records retention or the saving of space.

### **What are electronic/digital records?**

Records created digitally in the day-to-day business of the organisation and assigned formal status by the organisation. They may include for example, word processing documents, emails, databases, or intranet web pages.

### **How does the preservation of digital records differ?**

Retaining digital records over time is different to retaining paper copies for these reasons:

- A dependency on specific hardware and software to access over long periods of time.
- The speed of changes in technology means that the timeframe during which action must be taken is reduced from centuries with paper opposed to perhaps only 2-5 years with digital records.
- Obsolescence of technology is the greatest technical threat to ensuring continued access to digital material.
- Fragility of the media. Floppy disks, CDs & DVDs and tape digital materials are stored on inherently unstable materials and can deteriorate very quickly.

- The ability to change digital material from one software programme to another means that continued integrity, authenticity, and history of the digital materials is vulnerable.
- A digital resource which is not selected for active preservation treatment at an early stage will very likely be lost or unusable in the near future. (from: *The Preservation Management of Digital Material Handbook*)

## Can we retain our electronic documentation in that format?

The simple answer is NO. Floppy disks, CD's and DVD's continue to be a vulnerable medium to retain our information. There is a very real threat that the digital materials will be created in such a way that not even their short-term viability can be assured, much less the prospect that future generations will also have access to them.

## What are we to do?

The short-term answer to storage of electronic records is to store paper copies as **back up** for all correspondence, reports, and minutes. Parish membership lists and other data that are updated often should be printed and **dated** regularly. For both long- and short-term storage, back-up copies should be made regularly and stored separately, in a separate building, if at all possible. Data loss can occur for a variety of reasons during active use or in storage. Adequate back up will ensure that a high percentage of data can be restored for current activities.

All significant documentation should be printed out in hard copy

## What should we print out?

The Retention and Disposal Schedule below is a good guideline. The material that is recommended for permanent Archives preservation will be the material that should not remain in digital format.

- If the records use is primarily for reading/reference and its value is **permanent**, print and preserve a **paper copy** as the original.
- If the record is required to follow-up our legal and evidential activities, in other words a paper trail retain a **paper copy** as the original
- If the record is primarily for reading/reference and its value is temporary, preserve in whatever form is most convenient for use at the active and inactive stages of its life.
- If the record is primarily for data control and manipulation (e.g. accounting files, membership databases), preserve standard reports (such as annual financial reports) in **paper form**. Preserve the computer records in electronic form. However, these records must be maintained on media (e.g. disks) compatible with current hardware and **kept compatible** with upgrades or changes in software.