



## Policies of the Diocese of Kansas City ~ St. Joseph

### Policy # 130.4

#### Sacramental Records

Approved By: Most Reverend Raymond J. Boland, DD

Approved: May 2004

Effective:

Revised:

#### **Information Regarding Parish Registers**

##### **Procedures To Preserve Information in the Various Registers Required in the Parish**

The ownership and copyrights of all Roman Catholic Sacramental Records and Parish Registers belong to the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph. No one is allowed to publish nor to allow to be published for public consumption the content of parish Registers, without the consent of the Bishop.

1. Kinds of Registers: Canon Law requires the following parish registers to be maintained: Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage and Death (Canon 535 (895)). A First Communion Register is optional but recommended. Registers need to be clearly labeled as to name of parish and dates of records contained in the book. An index is required. Electronic preservation of records is permitted, but all data is to be recorded in a register (hardcopy). Such registers are readily available today.

Certain notations to be entered into the Registers may be supported by legal documents which should be retained, e.g., official certificates regarding name changes, establishment of paternity and the like. These items should not be glued, stapled or even paper clipped into the register. It is suggested that an envelope be attached to the inside of the back cover and such papers be kept in it.

When the sacraments of Confirmation and Marriage are celebrated in a parish which was not the parish of Baptism, the church of Baptism is to be notified by certificate or letter. Notification does not take place on the occasion of First Communion.

2. Since the information contained in Church records is accepted as legal proof, both in civil and canon law, of certain life events, e.g., birth, marriage, death, and can be used to establish American citizenship, the entries in the Registers must be made promptly, accurately and legibly. The record is to be printed in block letters, not written in longhand, except for signature. A record which is inaccurate or illegible is of no value when many years later it cannot be read or does not make sense. Along with this, the ink used in recording the information should

be black. Pencils and felt-tip pens are not acceptable.

With the passing of time, these registers become sources of historical information. Again the information should be complete and accurate.

3. If it is necessary later to correct a factual error, a notation is to be made in the ANotations@ column. The correction must be based on some official document or testimony beyond question. The source for the change must be identified in the notation. The arbitrary changing of records destroys their value, and leads to questioning the authenticity of other Church records. When in doubt, consult with the Chancellor.

4. The registers which are commercially available ask for all pertinent information. Supply the information asked for. For example, when it asks for a woman=s maiden name, it means exactly that - not her present married name. Information from official notifications, e.g., Confirmation, Marriage, Annulment, Ordination, Vows in Religious Life are to be entered in the appropriate column or in the Annotation column.

With regard to those entering the Church with a Profession of Faith: This information can be entered in the Baptism Register. Again, supply the information asked for. For date of Baptism, give the date and place of Baptism and in the Annotation column enter AProfession of Faith@ and give the date. The usual historical information asked for in the record should be supplied.

5. Children born out of wedlock: To record the name of the father for a child born out of wedlock, the paternity has to be proven either by some public document or by his own declaration before the pastor. The same could be required of the mother if there is some reason to doubt her maternity. If no father is identified, then leave that space blank in the record. It is not permitted to make an annotation which says the child is illegitimate.

6. Adoption: The policies for recording the baptisms of adopted children are spelled out elsewhere on this web site. Until the adoption is legally finalized, the adopting parents do not have the authority to have the child baptized, except in danger of death.

An notation is made in the Annotation column of the Baptism Register stating that the child is adopted. However, when issuing Baptismal certificates for adopted children, the annotation is not entered on the certificate. Informing an individual that he or she was adopted is not an appropriate task for Church personnel.

7. When marriages are "blessed" or convalidated in the Church, the data entered into the Marriage Register is exactly the same as it is when the marriage is celebrated in the Church without previous civil ceremony. It is not necessary to record a marriage, which was performed solely as a witness for the State, e.g., in the instance of a couple who divorces, and then decides to marry each other again (with no canonical annulment having taken place). If in doubt, consult the Tribunal.

The pre-nuptial papers are to be filed in the parish indefinitely. In the Marriage Register's Annotation column, if a dispensation was granted, it should be noted, as well as delegation given to assist at the marriage, and the diocese and protocol numbers of annulment(s) if any were obtained.

In instances in which a Catholic person receives permission to be married in a Protestant

Church, the practice is to record the marriage in the Register of the parish closest to the site of the marriage and to file the pre-nuptial papers in the parish files. That parish then is responsible to make the required notification(s).

8. Formal Withdrawal from the Catholic Church: If a request is made to delete a record of membership in the Catholic Church from the Baptism Register, the request must be made in writing, by the person whose record is concerned. The request should be entered in the Annotation Column, with date of the request, and the reason if given. The person should be informed that the record cannot be deleted from the Register, if the person so requests, but should be told that the annotation can and will be made. It is recommended that letters such as these be kept in a separate file. If a Baptism record is requested after the entry is made, this notation of withdrawal from the Catholic Church is to be noted on the certificate.

The formal notification of withdrawal from the Church releases the person from the observance of the canonical form of marriage, and such a person cannot be ordained priest.

9. It is the policy of the Diocese that annually copies of the previous calendar year=s baptismal and marriage records are to be sent to the Diocesan Archives, so that copies may exist in two places.

### **Allowing the Review of Registers and Issuing Certificates**

1. It is the policy of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph that records older than 50 years from the current date are open to the public. Records not yet 50 years old must be researched by parish personnel, who will then make the decision as to whether to release the record.

It is not our policy to release information regarding adoption or other information bearing on origin. A certificate can be released which does not include such information. Again, it is not our role to make people aware of these things.

2. In this age of identity theft, common sense, and paying attention to details of the request, may prevent releasing information to someone to whom it does not belong. It is not unreasonable to request some kind of identity proof if a concern is had. The information can be faxed to you. You do not have to release any record to anyone. If it is needed for the reception of a sacrament, have the parish priest call you. If needed for a government agency, have the intake worker call you. Both of these you can, in turn, confirm as trustworthy sources of the request.

3. Parishes are not required to allow anyone to see any of the records. If there is inadequate staff to supervise those asking to see the records, then refer the client to the Archives of the Diocese. There have been too many instances of people simply tearing pages out of registers, or even stealing the whole book to risk this. If the records are too fragile to be handled, or if there is no space for extra people in the office, again send the client to the diocesan archives. All of the parish Registers were microfilmed in the 1950s.

4. When Registers reach an age at which no one asks for information contained in the Register, or if the condition of the Register has deteriorated to the point of disintegration, or if the fire-proof vault in which the books are hopefully housed is too full, the books should be brought to the diocesan archives to see what can be done to preserve the original records.

5. Parish Personnel should feel free to consult the Archivist with any question. The preservation of history - and records are the foundation of history - is part of our tradition as Catholics.