

ROMAN CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE OF HARTFORD



OFFICE OF THE ARCHDIOCESAN ARCHIVES

POLICIES & PROCEDURES

~Sacramental Records~

The Archdiocesan Archives (est. 1976) is an administrative office of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Hartford (AOH)

OVERVIEW

- The AOH Archives does not hold or administer Sacramental Records.
 - Sacramental Records are created, maintained, and administered by the parishes - not the AOH Archives.
 - When necessary, the AOH Archives may retain certain Sacramental registers/ books onsite but, as a general rule, the AOH Archives does not hold Sacramental Records.
 - When onsite, the Archivist will maintain the records but, the Chancellor will administer the records.
- A central database for accessing and searching Sacramental Records does not exist.
 - Sacramental Records are not created and used in the same manner as public or vital records; the records are private in nature and not open to public review and use.

- Access and use of Sacramental Records is reserved for religious and legal obligations only; the records are not for the purposes of genealogy/ family history research, etc.
 - In a court of civil law, an official Sacramental Record certificate will stand as valid, authentic evidence when an appropriate public/vital record does not exist.
 - In accordance with Canon 486, 487, and 535, the AOH Archives does not provide assistance with genealogy/ family history research.
- The parish priest is to be aware of Sacramental Records that are missing and/or imperil and to promptly report such information to the Chancellor in writing.

CANON LAW & SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

- In accordance with Canon 535, Sacramental Records are private records of sacred origin. As such, the records are to be handled and administered with faithful sanctity and not distributed for temporal curiosity or open to immediate examination and inspection by anyone for whatever reason.
- Sacramental Records are required of and the responsibility of the parishes.
 - Sacramental Records originate with the parishes, not the archdiocesan central administration and therefore, are parish records, not archdiocesan administrative records. However, Sacramental Records are the property of the Church.
- Sacramental Records are created and used in circumstances presumed to be private and confidential. As such, the records are created and used by the Church for the purpose of tracking Sacraments received by an individual over the course of his/ her lifetime.
- The parish priest is responsible for the curation of the parish Sacramental Records.
 - The parish priest, in accordance with Canon Law and applicable civil laws, may discern if non-sensitive information contained in a Sacramental Record may or may not be disclosed to someone who is not the person named in the record.
 - The decision of the parish priest is final.

**GUIDELINES FOR OBTAINING
SACRAMENTAL RECORD CERTIFICATES:
OFFICIAL REASONS**

- A Sacramental Record certificate with official seal is only to be issued for official religious and legal reasons only.
 - An individual may request a certified copy of his/ her own Sacramental Records – personal copies (no fee).
 - Parents/ legal guardians may request a certified copy of their minor (under 18) child’s Sacramental Records (no fee).
 - Individuals may request certified copies of their Sacramental Records for official religious obligations, if so directed by an authorized Church or program related official (no fee). [*Required for First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, RCIA, Holy Orders, etc.*]
 - Authorized Church or related Church program officials may request certified copies of an individual’s Sacramental Records, on behalf of the individual, for purposes of a specified official religious obligations and/or for official Church business (no fee).
 - An individual may request a certified copy of his/ her own Sacramental Records as required for purposes of sponsoring someone who is receiving a Sacrament (no fee).
 - Certified copies of an individual’s Sacramental Records may also be obtained for the following reasons (fees may apply):
 - Admission to care facilities or retirement homes
 - Admission to college/university; seminary; trade or business schools; etc.
 - Citizenship/ dual citizenship applications/ requirements
 - Employment requirements (as applicable)
 - Establishing proof of identity in a court of law (when a civil record is absent)
 - Memberships applications for professional or religious societies

- Official court orders and related legal matters (as directed by the person's lawyer or a court official)
- Other applicable reasons as deemed reasonable by the parish priest and/or Church in accordance with Canon Law and applicable civil laws

HOW TO LOCATE & REQUEST SACRAMENTAL RECORDS: OFFICIAL & NON-OFFICIAL REASONS

Official Requests

- Directly contact the parish, (not the AOH Archives) where the Sacrament was received or the welcoming parish (if a parish has closed, merged, etc.) for assistance.
 - When a parish closes, merges, etc., the Sacramental Records are sent to the welcoming parish, not the AOH Archives.
- Or, complete and mail the **Sacramental Record Request Form** directly to the parish holding the records. (Forms received in the AOH Archives may result in delays.)
 - The **Sacramental Record Request Form** is not for genealogy/ family history research requests.
- Please use the **Location Guide: Parishes & Sacramental Records** to identify the current location of Sacramental Records and for contacting the appropriate parish(es).
 - Contact information for parishes is located on the AOH website under the Menu heading: **Directories**. Click on: **Find A Parish**.
- If a Sacrament was received at a hospital, school, or other non-parish location, please contact the respective institution and/or parish affiliated with the institution for assistance.
- Please contact the Diocese of Bridgeport and/or the Diocese of Norwich for Sacramental Records in parishes and institutions under their jurisdiction and not part of the Archdiocese of Hartford.
- If you are unsure of where the Sacrament was received, please consult family records such as address books, Bible records, diaries, letters, scrapbooks, and photograph albums; legal documents and public/ vital records; contact living relatives; and partner with local libraries and historical societies to aid your search and identify possible clues.

- The individual who is named in the records and/or is making the request is solely responsible for locating the records and may have to contact multiple parishes and/or institutions (if the individual is uncertain of where the Sacrament was received).
 - It is not the responsibility of the AOH central administration, the AOH Archives, or any individual parish, priest, or any such personnel or entity to locate the records for the requestor.
- Sacramental Records are hand-written entries inscribed in individual registers/ books that relate to the specific Sacrament received. Registers/ books must be manually searched and in some cases translated from Latin (pre-Vatican II) and/or other languages native to the parish.
 - Searches take time; patience is appreciated. Please allow 04-08 weeks on average to receive certificates - once a request is received. (Do not hesitate to confirm that a Sacramental Record request has been received.)
 - If a record is not found, you may need to continue your search,; please plan your time accordingly.
 - Record searches are only performed by the parish priest and/or an authorized parish administrator.
 - In accordance with Canon Law, all certificates must be drafted directly from the original Sacramental register/ book or its authenticated duplicate replacement; drafting certificates via secondary sources (supplemental books; compiled lists; digital records; etc.) is not permissible.
 - All certified certificates are sent by postal mail only and directly to the person named in the record or an authorized individual or official who has requested the record on behalf of the individual named in the record for legitimate reasons.
 - The Baptismal Register serves as the main ledger for tracking Sacraments received by an individual – a notation is made in the book whenever the individual receives a Sacrament.
 - If other Sacraments are received outside of the Baptismal parish, the administering parish is responsible for notifying the Baptismal parish of the Sacraments received; the Baptismal parish is then responsible for entering the appropriate notation into the individual’s Baptismal record.
 - Said notifications are to be received by postal mail only and in appropriate format as described by Canon Law (not electronic/ digital format) to be accepted as valid and so entered into the record.

- To curb identity theft and be compliant with Canon Law and applicable civil laws, current valid photo identification and supporting documentation may be required and fees may apply before a record search is performed and before receiving a certified certificate of a Sacramental Record.
- If the requested records are unable to be found, after a due diligence search on the part of the requestor, please contact both your parish priest and the AOH Chancellor for assistance – together, they will discern a suitable solution.
- All documentation associated with a request is to be retained with the parish permanent files.
 - Documentation may include request forms and letters; response forms and letters; research notes; phone conversation notes; supporting documents, copies of emails; final product documents (certificates, etc.); payment records; etc.

Non-Official Requests

- Please submit a formal or standard business-style letter by postal mail addressed to the parish priest. Clearly identify who you are, what specifically you are searching for in the records, and provide a valid reason for your inquiry and/or supporting official documentation for your request.
 - Please note that genealogical/ family history information that may or may not be contained in Sacramental Records is often readily available via other public source such as vital records offices, town/city clerk's offices, public libraries (special collection, history room, genealogy room, archives), state archives, historical societies, etc.
- In keeping with the U.S. Census Bureau's guidelines regarding privacy, **ALL SACRAMENTAL RECORDS LESS THAN SEVENTY-TWO YEARS OLD ARE CLOSED TO RESEARCH.**
- The decision of the parish priest to release or not release non-sensitive information contained in a Sacramental Record, to someone who is not the person named in the record and/or for non-official reasons, is final.
 - The parish priest, parish staff, and parish itself are not obligated to provide genealogical/ family history assistance and/or disclose any information contained in a Sacramental Record – private or non-private.
 - Record searches are only performed by the parish priest and/or an authorized parish administrator.

- Research findings may be answered by means of a letter, standard research form, or an uncertified (no seal) Sacramental certificate; actual copies of the page containing the Sacramental Record is prohibited by Canon Law. Fees may apply. *[Applicable fee range: \$25.00 - \$50.00 per request/ search.]*
 - If an uncertified certificate is used, **Non-official** or **Genealogy Request** will appear on the signature line and a **line** will be drawn through the date line – an official seal will not to be applied.
- All documentation associated with a request is to be retained with the parish permanent files.
 - Documentation may include request forms and letters; response forms and letters; research notes; phone conversation notes; supporting documents, copies of emails; final product documents (certificates, etc.); payment records; etc.

**PROCESS FOR REPORTING & REPLACING MISSING
& IMPERIL SACRAMENTAL RECORDS:
AT THE PARISH LEVEL**

- When Sacramental Records belonging to the parish and/or any of its charges are unable to be located due to loss, theft, or misplacement; have been damaged, vandalized, or destroyed; found to contain illegible or incorrect entries; have become too fragile for handling; etc.; such information is to be promptly reported, in writing, to the Chancellor by the parish priest.
- The Chancellor in conjunction with the Archivist will carefully assess the situation and determine an appropriate course of action.
- Replacement of Sacramental Record registers/ books with an authenticated duplicate may be possible for parishes that have participated in the past Archdiocesan Sacramental Record microfilm preservation projects (conducted in 1964, 1983, and 1999).
 - Only the Chancellor and Archivist may recall the Sacramental Record preservation microfilm and authorize an official copy to be made. Both the Chancellor and the Archivist will authenticate any duplicate copy for replacement of any original Sacramental Record register/ book.
 - Only the Chancellor may authorize an authenticate duplicate replacements of Sacramental Records; all other replacement copies are considered non-authentic and invalid for use.

- The parish is financially responsible for the cost of replacing any Sacramental Record registers/ books with authenticated duplicate replacements. An entire register/ book will be reproduced, not sections or pages.
- The Sacramental Record preservation microfilm is not a source to be used by parishes or individuals in lieu of accessing the original Sacramental registers/ books. The parishes are responsible for maintaining and administering Sacramental Records, not the AOH Archivist or Chancellor.
 - The preservation microfilm will not be pulled for individual record searches requested by parishes, individuals, AOH offices, affiliated institutions, etc.
 - A fee will be assessed if the preservation microfilm is recalled for such purposes.
 - The Chancellor and/or Archivist may, at their discretion, pull the preservation microfilm for emergency use only.
- Please contact the Chancellor or Archivist with any questions.