

GUIDELINES FOR RETAINING CHURCH RECORDS

Following is an abbreviated quick-reference guide for retaining the records of the local church.

For additional details or guidance, please contact your Conference Archivist:

Laurie Langland, Dakota Wesleyan University, 1200 W. University Ave., Mitchell, SD 57301
 605-995-2134 (phone) 605-995-2893 (fax) LaLangla@dwu.edu (e-mail)

Essential/Administrative Permanent Records	Description	Comments
Membership records	Membership registers, lists of baptisms, marriages, transfers, funerals and/or death records	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Administrative reports	Charge Conference reports, Administrative Board reports, Council on Ministries report, or administrative council reports	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Architectural drawings, blueprints, and maps	For church buildings, parsonages, and cemeteries	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Audit records	Audit records, if not included in the Charge Conference reports	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Bequest and estate papers	Wills, gift agreements, bequests	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Budget records	Annual budgets, if not already included in the Charge Conference reports	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Committee records	Agendas, minutes, and reports of committees, councils, and boards	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Deeds	Deeds, conveyances, covenants, easements, title papers – land, church buildings, parsonages, cemeteries	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Official local church histories		Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Historical/Permanent Records	Description	Comments
Bulletins	Sunday worship bulletins, special occasion bulletins	Keep permanently; transfer to archives the special occasion bulletins
Correspondence-subject	Correspondence on specific subjects	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Directories	Pictorial directories illustrate the people and church life	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Newsletters	Church newsletters, UMW, UMM, UMYF and other church groups' newsletters	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Photos/Images	Photographs (digital and print), slides, negatives – anything that shows the life of the local church, including the people, buildings, and special events	Keep permanently; transfer to archives
Scrapbooks	Scrapbooks and photo albums (print and digital) that show the life of the church	Keep permanently; transfer to archives

PLEASE NOTE: Local/state/federal laws may affect the keeping of some of these records. Before disposing of any records, make sure there is no pending litigation, and that the time has expired on the records retention period. Also make sure there is nothing of historical value in them, and dispose of them properly to prevent identity theft or theft of sensitive information.

Administrative records	Description	Comments
Accident and injuries records	Workers compensation claims records	Retain for 6 years after case settlement
Accounts payable records, including invoices and paid bills	Claims and disbursements records, expenses, accounting, bookkeeping, paid invoices, finance, purchasing	Retain for 7 years; however, payments for major building construction/alterations should be kept permanently
Accounts receivable records	Membership contributions, offering records	Retain for 7 years
Annual fiscal reports	Closing of the books records, financial reports, balance reconciliation records, state accounts reports	Retain permanently; official copy to archives
Bank statements and canceled checks	Routine statement of accounts; checks written on church accounts	Retain for 7 years
Benefits policies and procedures records	Formal documents and decisions	Transfer to archives when superseded
Correspondence-transitory	Routine correspondence	Retain 1 year, then review and destroy
Deduction authorization records	Deductions from salary checks authorized by employees	Retain 4 years after authorization expires or is superseded
Employment eligibility verification forms	Establish identity and verify employment eligibility	Retain 1 year after employee separation or after 3 years, whichever is longer
Employment policies and procedures records	Documents administered by personnel office	Permanent retention; transfer to archives
Grievance records	Documents involved in a grievance	Retain 3 years after grievance is settled
Pay authorization records	Issuance of payroll checks	Retain 5 years
Personnel records-staff	Information about employees, job descriptions	Retain 7 years after termination
Personnel records-ministerial	Directory/genealogical information about pastors	Permanent retention; transfer to archives
Tax withholding authorization records	Documents the amounts withheld from payroll checks	Retain 7 years after authorization expires or is superseded

The following documents are available from the General Commission on Archives and History's website at:

http://www.gcah.org/site/c.ghKJI0PHIoE/b.3611175/k.37E7/Guidelines_for_Managing_Records.htm

- "Guidelines for Managing Records of the Annual Conference & the Local Church," 2009-2012 Edition, 60 pages
- "Guidelines for Managing Electronic Records," 2009-2012 Edition, 29 pages
- "Guidelines for Retaining the Records of Closed United Methodist Churches," 2009 Edition, 6 pages