



RECORDING AND MAINTAINING SACRAMENTAL RECORDS

RCAB Archive, 2021

Summary:

This document is designed to assist parish clergy and staff with regular entry and maintenance of sacramental records. Please contact the Archive Department with any questions or concerns at archive@rcab.org or 617-746-5897.

Table of Contents

I. Entering Records	2
Multi-Church Parishes and Multi-Parish Collaboratives	2
Multi-parish Confirmations	2
Easter Vigil	3
Conversions and Professions of Faith	3
Ethnic Apostolates	3
II. Issuing Certificates	3
Baptisms	3
First Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage Certificates	4
III. Entering Updates	4
Updating Record of Adopted Child	4
Legal Name Change	5
IV. Corrections to Records	5
Requests to Change Parents, Sponsors, or Witnesses	5
Request to Correct Name or Date of Birth	5

Please note that “the pastor is to see to it that these [sacramental] registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved (Canon 535, §1).” If the task of entering records into the registers is delegated to a parish staff member, responsibility for their completeness and accuracy still resides with the pastor.

I. Entering Records

Each parish must keep a separate register for each sacrament: baptisms, confirmations, marriages, and deaths. First communions and sick calls are optional, but advisable.

Records should be entered into the appropriate register, in chronological order, immediately following the celebration of a sacrament.

Electronic records are not an acceptable substitute for records entered into the register, though a second copy may be kept in an electronic format.

Entries should be printed (not cursive), in either blue or black ink waterproof ink, and as neatly as possible.

Please enter all information requested and do not leave any fields blank.

For baptisms, please place a small “M” or “F” in parentheses in the bottom-right corner of the “Name” field to clarify the sex of each child.

Please use the index pages if provided in the register. Enter each name “Last name, First name” in the corresponding section and include the page number of the corresponding record.

Multi-Church Parishes and Multi-Parish Collaboratives

Canon law dictates that sacramental records be maintained at the parish level.

Parishes containing multiple churches should maintain **one** set of sacramental registers under the name of the parish. If desired, the name of the church may be written in the notations of a baptismal or marriage record, or near the date and officiant at the beginning of each first communion and confirmation class record.

Multi-parish collaboratives should maintain a separate set of sacramental registers for each parish.

Multi-parish Confirmations

When parishes hold a joint confirmation ceremony, when candidates prepare for the sacraments at their respective parishes but are confirmed at the same ceremony, all recipients should be entered in the register of the parish where the ceremony takes place.

For those candidates who prepared at the parish where the ceremony did not take place, it is advisable to make a note in the confirmation register of the parish(es) stating the following:

“[Parish 1] confirmation candidates for the year [YYYY] received the sacrament at [Parish 2] on [DD Month YYYY], [Name] officiated. Please refer to the records of [Parish 2] for a list of recipients.”

For example: “Saint Joseph confirmation candidates for the year 2020 received the sacrament at Saint Mary on 31 July 2020, Bishop John Fitzpatrick officiated. Please refer to the records of Saint Mary for a list of recipients.”

Easter Vigil

In the case where an individual receives baptism, first communion, and confirmation during the Easter Vigil, each instance should be entered into the appropriate register. To clarify, the baptism should be entered into the baptismal register, first communion into the first communion register, and confirmation into the confirmation register.

For candidates who only receive confirmation, then it need only be recorded in the confirmation register.

These guidelines apply to all RCIA candidates.

Conversions and Professions of Faith

If a convert has not been baptized, the baptism and any other sacraments received should be recorded in the appropriate registers as with the 'Easter Vigil' above.

If a convert is a baptized Christian, please enter the profession of faith in the confirmation register. In the column for baptism, please enter the church, city, date and faith in which they were baptized. In the notations or remarks section, please note that the event was a "Profession of Faith" and not a confirmation.

Ethnic Apostolates

Sacraments administered in a ceremony arranged by an ethnic apostolate should be entered into the parish register where the event took place, **not** in each recipient's home parish.

II. Issuing Certificates

Baptisms

There is a short form and a long form for baptismal certificates.

Short Form

Since there can be sensitive information in baptismal records (birth parents, adoption information, etc.), the short form omits fields such as parent and sponsor names, and is therefore the **only form which can be provided directly to an individual.**

The short form should be used for the following:

- For an individual requesting a copy of his/her own record to keep for themselves.
- Government identification needs:
 - ex. To add/amend name on a birth certificate, prove a marriage for social security benefits, renew driver's license or passport, etc.*
- Dual-citizenship applications (unless the record is "historic," pre-1940, in which case a long form may be used).

*Government offices are no longer accepting short form certificates and now require the names of parents. We advise when an inquiry is made for government ID purposes to ask the parishioner the names of his/her parents. Assuming the names match those in the record, you may add them somewhere on the certificate

Long Form

The long form certificate should only be used for official Church purposes. **These should never be issued directly to an individual, but should be mailed to a priest or parish office.**

The long form should be used for the following:

- Individuals preparing to receive the sacraments of first communion, confirmation, marriage, or holy orders.
- Individuals applying for an annulment (these may also be sent to a Metropolitan Tribunal).

Post-adoption Baptism

If a child was baptized after an adoption, then all details transcribed onto a certificate should refer to the adopted name of the child, names of the adoptive parents, sponsors the adoptive parents chose, etc. No information regarding the birth parents or adoption should be transcribed on the certificate.

Children Baptized Prior to Adoption

If a child was baptized prior to adoption, enter the birth name, birth parents, and birth sponsors of the child in the appropriate fields and place parentheses around each. Then, in the same respective fields, enter the adoptive name of the child, adoptive parents' names, and adoptive sponsors' names following those in parentheses.

First Communion, Confirmation, and Marriage Certificates

Other sacramental certificates may be sent directly to individuals on the basis that they would have been old enough to recall details related to the event, and only details from that time should be entered. For instance, a confirmation record should only include the candidate's parents from that time, even if the candidate's baptismal record shows he/she was adopted. Nonetheless, please remain mindful of any potentially sensitive information.

III. Entering Updates

The parish of baptism should be notified of any additional sacraments an individual receives as soon as possible following the celebration of that sacrament. Updates should be entered into the notations section at the end of the record. The only exception is in some instances where there is a separate field for confirmation information.

The notification should include the name of the recipient, parish of baptism, and date of baptism. It should also include the sacrament received, date, officiant, parish, city and state. In the case of a marriage, please also include the spouse's name.

Annulments should also be added to the notations section.

If an individual receives additional sacraments at the parish of baptism, the baptismal record should still be updated to reflect this.

Once an update has been entered, the notice of entry, if there is one, should be returned to the notifying parish. All remaining papers should be securely discarded; please do not leave papers interleaved between pages of the register, this causes damage to the binding.

Updating Record of Adopted Child

If the baptized individual was subsequently adopted, place parentheses around the name of the baptized and birth parents. Enter the new name of the baptized and the adoptive parent(s) above or below the initial entries as space allows. Adoption information should be entered into the notations, including date, case number and agency. This should only be completed with sufficient evidence to show that the adoption has been properly completed. Finally, please update the index by adding the new name and corresponding page number in the correct section.

Legal Name Change

In the case where an unwed mother later marries and the mother and child take the husband's surname, place parentheses around the birth surname of the child and enter the new surname. In the notations enter the date, location and other information related to where the legal name change was approved. Finally, please update the index by adding the new name and corresponding page number in the correct section.

If an individual legally changes his/her name (not through of adoption or marriage), likewise place parentheses around the former name and record the new name, and include any details related to the date and place the legal name change was approved in the notations. Finally, please update the index by adding the new name and corresponding page number in the correct section.

IV. Corrections to Records

In the event of a minor error, such as a spelling mistake or incorrect date, please draw a single line through the incorrect information and write the correct information above or below as space allows.

Do not under any circumstances attempt to erase information, use correction liquid, correction tape, ink, etc.

Requests to Change Parents, Sponsors, or Witnesses

We do not fulfill requests to change the parents, sponsors or witnesses due to severed family/friend relationships. The entry informs us that the individuals were present at the time and is a historical fact we cannot alter.

Request to Correct Name or Date of Birth

In rare instances an individual's name or birth date may not have been recorded correctly. When this is the case, the record can be corrected if the individual can provide at least one form of government issued photograph identification; ideally the person will provide more than one document to prove the entry incorrect.

Entering a Missing Record

If a sacrament was received, or believed to have been received, and there is no record in the parish register a careful attempt must be made to confirm that the event did happen at the stated place and time.

In these instances, please refer the individual to archive@rcab.org and we will be glad to investigate and, if necessary, provide instructions for entering a record after the fact.