



The Work of a Congregational Archivist and/or Archives Committee

The archivist or archives committee of a congregation is primarily concerned with collecting and appraising, preserving and protecting, arranging and describing and making accessible original historical documents and records of the congregation. An archivist is not necessarily the historian or interpreter of the congregation's history. The archivist or archives committee should work in close cooperation with the pastor and congregation council as well as others creating records. Policies for the archives should be established by vote of the council, in cooperation with and at the advice of the archivist or archives committee. The following information includes steps to take in establishing a committee, as well as some of the tasks that would be included in a job description for an archivist or archives committee.

1. Identify an individual to serve as archivist and/or create an archives committee.

A. Establish a committee according to constitutional provisions for a congregational committee, including approval by the congregation council.

B. Seek persons who have an interest in the history of the congregation and good organizational skills.

C. Include pastor, parish secretary, or other relevant persons as ex-officio committee members.

2. Survey and identify locations of all historical records for possible retention in the congregation archives.

A. Consult with those responsible for records creation as to how and when records move into archival custody.

B. If none exists, encourage a records management program be adopted for all records, in order to manage them through the life cycle -- active, inactive, to archives.

C. For records created electronically, verify that policies on back-up of computer data are in place to prevent losses.

D. Verify that all vital records are identified and a plan is in place for copies to be made for disaster recovery. Encourage development of a full business continuity plan.

3. Identify and maintain space that can be used to store records of long-term historical value. As part of that work, consideration should be given to:

A. Creating a policy to limit access to the archives to authorized and/or designated persons only.

B. Ensuring the space is free from extreme temperature and humidity changes, as well as protected from disasters such as fire and floods.

C. Ensuring the space stays clean

and includes shelving and filing cabinets for records storage and a work table for those organizing the archives and for those who will use the materials.

4. Organize materials according to archival methods, by who created the records, not by subject.

A. Bring records discovered through survey into archival custody.

B. Create a method for ongoing receipt of materials into the archives, including a record of personal donations. This can include working with aspects of the congregational records retention schedule, so that records are moved from “current” to “archival” status in a consistent way.

C. Locate current and former organizational charts, directories of leadership, or other items that may provide information on what individuals and groups were active at any given time.

D. Group similar things together from governance and program groups, and check for missing items, such as minutes, reports and correspondence. Locate missing items or seek to re-create records or information if needed.

E. Involve various persons to locate materials, including possibly donating personal copies of items or personal records to substitute or complement the records already available.

F. Label boxes and file drawers as to contents and prepare container lists -- lists of folders or volumes with a brief physical description of contents and inclusive dates.

H. Write further descriptive information such as historical notes, descrip-

tion of the scope and contents of the records, or missing materials.

5. While organizing the records, make preservation assessments:

A. Determine what archival supplies are needed.

B. Refolder and rebox materials using archival supplies.

C. If records are greatly deteriorated, seek help from a professional archivist.

D. For non-paper records special considerations will be needed.

E. After determining what preservation activity may be needed, plan and prioritize what should and can be done first.

6. Create policies for the archives:

A. General policy on use and access.

B. Specific guidelines may be needed for specific records that are confidential and relate to individual privacy needs.

C. Approval of archives policies should be done according to the governance for the congregation.

7. Convene meetings of the archives committee as necessary and report regularly to the congregation council on progress, concerns and approval of policies and procedures related to archives and record keeping.