



Disposition of Records : Advice for Disbanding Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Preserve your history!

Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are the sole owners of their records. The preservation of these records must be addressed properly when a congregation ceases to exist. Records of disbanded congregations are important for documenting the life of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and shall be incorporated into the archives of this church.

Procedures for transferring records to the Archives:

1. After synodical officials have had the opportunity to close the affairs of the congregation, the records shall be transferred to the appropriate synodical or regional archives.
2. Before you dispose of anything, contact your synodical or regional archivist for guidance regarding how to proceed with transferring your materials.
3. A portion of the congregation's remaining assets should be given to the archives to cover the cost of processing, cataloging, maintaining, and giving access to the legal and historical records, photographs, and other materials that represent the congregation's history.
4. Records of archival value that exist only in digital formats should be printed out for transfer to the archives.
5. Whenever and wherever records of disbanded congregations are discovered, every effort should be made to place such records in the archives of this church.

It is presumed that any ELCA congregation formed by merger or consolidation will receive ownership of the records of each of its predecessor congregations and will be responsible for maintaining them.

Congregations leaving the ELCA may take their records with them. For future reference, maintain a record of the congregation's decision to leave the ELCA in the synod office and in the archives of the synod or region.

All of the archives of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America are open for those who wish to research the records of disbanded congregations.



Disposition of Records : Advice for Disbanding Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

These are the permanent records of your congregation's history :

The history of your congregation will be preserved in records that have been maintained with care.

- Parish Register/Congregational Record [\[i\]](#)
- Charter, Articles of Incorporation, and Constitutions
- Minutes and reports of regular and special congregational meetings
- Minutes of the Congregation Council and its Executive Committee
- Minutes and other records of committees and auxiliary organizations for men, women, and youth
- Letters of call or employment and appropriate biographical material for rostered leaders and staff (*see Records Retention Schedule for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America*)
- Correspondence of historical significance
- Parish newsletters
- Other significant publications, such as directories, anniversary history booklets, and news releases
- Programmatic, worship, and music materials generated by the congregation
- Annual audit reports and year end budgets and treasurer's reports (may be part of the minutes of the annual meeting)
- Property related documents such as deeds, titles, surveys, mortgages, easements, blueprints, and construction drawings [\[ii\]](#)
- Documentation of endowments, bequests and restricted gifts
- All insurance policies
- Photographs and negatives, films, DVD and videotapes, sound recordings, all properly marked identifying persons, dates, and events.
- "Snapshots" of the congregation's World Wide Web site

See also these additional guidelines

Active Records Management : Advice for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Records Retention Schedule for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Maintaining the Congregational Record: Advice for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Resources for Congregational Treasurers and Bookkeepers



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

Disposition of Records : Advice for Disbanding Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

A Brief Guide for Archives of Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Comparison of Microfilming and Digital Preservation Technologies
An Order for the Disposal of Bibles and other Respected Publications

For additional information, contact:

Archives of the ELCA
Office of the Secretary
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
321 Bonnie Lane
Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
Telephone: 800/638-3522, ext. 2818
e-mail: archives@elca.org

or the archivist for your synod.

© Edition current as of February 2024 Office of the Secretary, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. These guidelines may be copied for use in the congregation provided copyright is acknowledged.

Notes

ⁱ See the document Maintaining the Congregational Record : Advice for Congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

ⁱⁱ (The ELCA Churchwide Constitution (9.71.) and the Model Constitution for Congregations (*C7.01) address property issues regarding congregations that are no longer a part of this church. This policy relates only the disposition of records.)