



EPISODE 6

TO KEEP OR NOT TO KEEP

THE VALUE OF A
RETENTION SCHEDULE



PART OF THE CONGREGATIONAL LIBRARY & ARCHIVES' CHURCH STEWARDSHIP INITIATIVE

RECORDS MANAGEMENT

The systematic and administrative control of records throughout their life cycle to ensure efficiency and economy in their creation, use, handling, control, maintenance, and disposition.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

RETENTION SCHEDULE

A document that identifies and describes an organization's records, usually at the series level, and provides instructions for the disposition of records throughout their life cycle.



**Congregational
Library & Archives**

congregationallibrary.org

ACTIVE VS. INACTIVE RECORDS

Active Records

Frequently used

Easily accessible

Administrative and information uses

Types of active records may include administrative reports, committee records, special correspondences, meeting minutes, and audit reports.

Inactive Records

Are not frequently used

Not as well accessible, could be in offsite storage

Legal, historical, or operational uses

Membership records are a good example.



**Congregational
Library & Archives**

congregationallibrary.org

DESTRUCTION

The disposal process that results in the obliteration of records.

Professional services exist when dealing with a large amount of material that needs shredding, but most churches will be fine with a regular paper shredder.

Examples: HR documents, bank accounts/checks, social security numbers, other documents on an employee



**Congregational
Library & Archives**

congregationallibrary.org

DISPOSITION

A given material's final destruction or transfer to an archives as determined by their owners.

Every archive has different collecting scopes that determine material they will and will not accept.

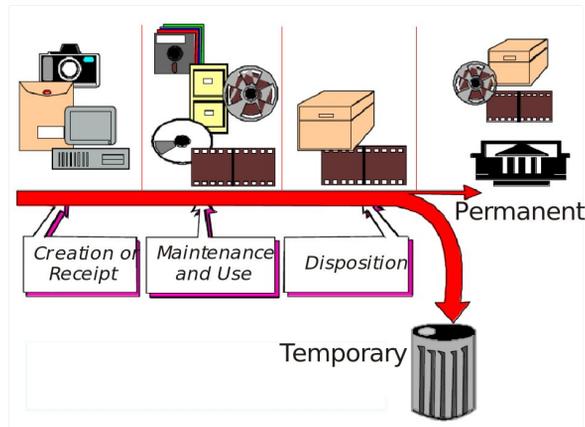
The CLA works with churches that are still open, on the way toward closing, or are already closed.



**Congregational
Library & Archives**

congregationallibrary.org

RECORDS LIFECYCLE



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

WHY SHOULD MY CHURCH CARE?

Today's records have equal value to the records of yesterday and both need to be treated with equal care and respect.

Our workshops were launched to provide the tools needed to do the work of records management and the retention schedule is integral to this process.

Preserves the mission, community, and history of your churches for current and future generations.

For many of you, a majority of your records are unique and can never be replaced.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

A MODEL RETENTION SCHEDULE

- **Document Type:** Type of record created
- **Description:** Examples/Explanation of document type
- **Retention Period:** How long records are kept.
- **Archive:** Whether records should be added to permanent archive.

MODEL RETENTION SCHEDULE FOR CHURCHES			
Building Records			
Document Type	Description	Retention Period	Archive
Construction Documents	Blueprints, Plans, Architectural Renderings and Drawings	Permanent	Yes
Deeds	Deeds, Conveyances, Covenants, Easements	Permanent	Yes
Real Estate Documents	Surveys, Plot Plans, Related Correspondence	Permanent	Yes
Church Records			
Document Type	Description	Retention Period	Archive
Administrative Reports	Charge Conference reports, Administrative Board reports, Council on Ministries report, or administrative council reports	Permanent	Yes, after 4 Years
Annual Reports	Closing of the Books Records, Financial Reports, Balance Reconciliation Records, State Accounts Reports	Permanent	Yes
Articles of Faith	Covenants	Permanent	Yes
Articles of Incorporation	Founding Documents, Constitutions	Permanent	Yes
Bylaws		Permanent	Yes
Bulletins	Sunday Worship Bulletins, Event Programs	2 Years	No
Church Policies and Resolutions	Policy Documents, Official Resolutions	Permanent	Yes



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

RECORDS SERIES

- **Building Records:** Records and legal documents related to the church building, and any other buildings owned by the church. Includes deeds, construction documents, and blueprints.
- **Church Records:** Records and documents created in support of the operation and administration of the church. Includes minutes, committee records, bulletins and newsletters, and office correspondence.
- **Financial Records:** Records and documents created to track, document, report, and understand the inflow and outflow of money at the church. Includes tax and IRS documents, ledgers, bank documents, invoices, and receipts.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

RECORDS SERIES

- **Human Resource Records:** Records and documents created in relation to employment activities. Includes employment forms, personnel files, policy documents, search records, and W-2 forms.
- **Legal Records:** Legal documents, often created in consultation with third-parties, about the status or standing of the church in certain legal settings. Includes appraisals, insurance policies, bequests, donor records, and grant documentation.
- **Membership Records:** Record,s especially vital records, about the people, members and nonmembers, who visit the church. Includes vital records (baptisms, marriages, deaths), logbooks, handbooks, and directories.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

A FEW IMPORTANT NOTES

Our Information Comes From a Few Sources

United Methodist's General
Commission on Archives & History

Mission Box guidelines for nonprofit
organizations

Personal experience processing church
records collections

Key Disclaimers

We are not lawyers.

These are just guidelines. There may
be local, state, or jurisdictional
requirements that supersede these
guidelines.

Your denomination may have their
own guidelines.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Work First to Create Buy-In

Cannot simply adopt retention schedule and expect things to go smoothly.
Must first introduce schedule to stakeholders and work with them to create buy-in to the plan.

Accountability is Key

Ensure all stakeholders are trained on the plan once implemented.
Once policies are in place, periodically ensure that they are being used properly.

Document Everything

Implementation will be an iterative process. Some flexibility must be baked into your implementation plan.
When decisions, changes, or exceptions are made, update policy documents immediately.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

ACTIVE RECORDS (MAINTENANCE)

Active records, even if they are no longer being edited or updated, should be easily accessible for those who may need them. Active records, including permanently active records, should not be kept with the archival collection.

Defined Locations: Document where specific types of materials are stored. Ideally all active documents are stored in one room, but if not, make sure to document which room stores which types of materials.

Defined Labels: Define and document labels that you use to store and sort documents. Make liberal use of dates in labels and sorting. Consistency over the long term will save you from future headaches.

Defined Schedule: Define and document, as best as possible, when certain documents are added to the active records.

Defined Access: Define and document who may access what kinds of documents. Use measures, such as locked filing cabinets, to help keep safe certain types of sensitive materials.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

MAINTAINING DIGITAL FILES

Whether you have a local server, a cloud-based file sharing system, or an office computer with a hard-drive, the rules that apply to physical documents also apply to digital documents.

Defined File Structures: Create and document a defined file structure. Use an org chart or the 6 document series to define an overarching file structure. Be granular. Ideally, once finalized, there should be minimal need to create new organizational folders.

Defined File Names: Create and document a file naming structure. One should be able to tell what a file is by simply looking at the file name. This makes searching and organizing significantly easier. An example: Department_FileType_Date
(ChurchCommittee_Minutes_20240417)



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

LIFE AFTER ACTIVE (DISPOSITION)

Though some records should remain permanently active, most records will need to either move into the archive or be disposed of after a set amount of time.

Annual Disposition Review: Create a single time, annually, when disposition will happen. New calendar or new fiscal years mark useful turning points.

Shred, Recycle, or Trash: Define and document which records may be safely recycled or thrown out versus which need to be shred before disposal.

Update your Archive Inventory: Ideally your archive has an inventory, or even a map, that can easily be updated once new materials enter the archive. If using well sorted/labeled/dated folders, you shouldn't even need to rename folders or create new folders when moving them to the archive.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

ARCHIVING DIGITAL FILES

Some of your digital records will also need to enter the archive. While the topic of digital archiving is too broad to cover in any depth in this presentation, below are some key points to consider when considering the disposition of digital records.

Key Documents MUST be Printed: Critical documents, such as certain legal documents, must be printed out before entering the archive. If you cannot afford to lose a document, it is far better to have a physical copy of it.

Archival File Structure: The digital archive should be separate from the active digital files. The file structure of your digital archive should mimic, exactly, the file structure of your active digital files.

Convert Documents to PDFs: When possible, convert documents to PDFs (PDF/A) before moving them to the archive. PDFs are more interoperable than proprietary software (such as Microsoft Word) and helps to keep documents in a state where they cannot easily be edited after archiving.

Sufficient Storage: For now, cloud-based file sharing systems are sufficient for archival storage of digital files. While not ideal at all, they are ultimately safer than most physical storage media.



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org

STAY IN TOUCH

YOUTUBE

[YOUTUBE.COM/@CONGREGATIONALLIBRARY](https://www.youtube.com/@congregationallibrary)

X (FORMERLY TWITTER)

@CONGRELIB

BLUESKY

@CONGRELIB



FACEBOOK

[FACEBOOK.COM/CONGREGATIONALLIBRARY](https://www.facebook.com/congregationallibrary)

INSTAGRAM

@CONGREGATIONALLIBRARY

THREADS

@CONGREGATIONALLIBRARY



Congregational
Library & Archives

congregationallibrary.org