

# What to do with old church records!

Baptist Church Archives, Qld Guide Sheet No 16

<http://www.dparker.net.au/old-church-records.pdf>

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Most churches have gone digital with their records for many years now. So there is probably a collection of old church paper records cluttering up the church office which has not been touched for several years. Tempted to throw it all out?

Yet these records contain important information that you will likely need at some time for planning, review and possibly legal reasons. As well as this, they contain the history and witness of your church which is worth sharing. So what is the best thing to do with these records? This Guide Sheet offers step by step practical solutions which will give you continued access to these records and make them available to reveal the story of God's grace in your church for years to come.

Other Archives Guide Sheets which will assist the process – available at <http://www.dparker.net.au/barc-sheets.htm>

**Here are the steps to take:** Please also see our CAR form for help with this <http://www.dparker.net.au/d-CAR-09.pdf>

## Finding and Identifying the Records

1. Locate all the records you can, whether at church, at private homes or perhaps even a local historical library. Records could include minute books, annual reports, roll books for church and its organisations, registers, photographs etc. <http://www.dparker.net.au/d-Church-Records-to-keep.pdf>
2. Identify these records, label them and give them an ID number (non-destructive ways – post-it note on outside). For example: 1. Church meeting minutes 1950-61; 2. Junior Sunday School Roll 1970-73; 3. Ladies fellowship minutes 1975
3. Sort them into categories and by date (e.g., church minutes, Sunday roll books, Ladies Fellowship reports)
4. Make a written list of all the records (with identity number, category, date); use this list as an index and project control
5. Identify any records that are missing from the sequence and try to find them and add them in

Note: during this process, check to see that the records are clean and in good physical order, and take any minimal action needed to conserve them – eg, remove sticky tape, rubber bands, rusting staples/clips, carefully unfold creased papers etc

## Policy Decision

After examining the complete collection of records, and placing them in order of importance, make a policy decision at the appropriate administrative level about what to retain, how to manage, and store records, according to the following options. (See Guide Sheet, Managing Church Records <http://www.dparker.net.au/d-MangChrchArc.pdf>)

Note that special care needs to be taken with retaining financial records according to ACNC, ATO and accountants' requirements, personal information relevant to the National Redress Scheme and other legal matters, and current property and HR documents. Separate considerations apply where the church operates other activities such as school, kindy, op shop etc

## General Options for On-going management of old paper church records

1. **Retain on site:** all records would be retained in the church office under the control of the Church Administrator, with suitable access rules and appropriate budget and practical steps for storage and maintenance. Use list above as index.
2. **Digitise records and retain physical records on site** (the physical records would not normally need to be touched in the future and some could be disposed) See our Guide Sheet <http://www.dparker.net.au/d-Digitising-Church-Records-by-Steps.pdf> Note that the Baptist Church Archives welcomes copies of the digital records under this option.
3. **Digitise records (optional) and transfer key records (and digital copy) to Baptist Church Archives.** This option involves discussion with the Baptist Church Archives at an early stage to assess the collection and the policy of acceptance of records. A cut off point for 'current' or 'active' records should also be determined.

### Physical records to be transferred under this option would include, subject to discussion:

*Church minutes, Deacons/Elders/Leaders Minutes, annual church reports, annual church financial statements, roll books of church and departments (not current volumes), key historical legal and property documents (not current), photographs (selected, identified and good quality only), registers (marriage, infant dedications, baptisms – not current), constitutions/by-laws, histories of the church, church bulletins/newsletters (selected issues only)* Note that detailed financial papers such as ledgers, butts, statements, invoices are not needed unless they relate to major important projects)

After having made the decision about these options, proceed to implement the plan locally, or contact Baptist Church Archives for transfer of documents. Local arrangements may require acquisition of storage cabinets, provision of secure storage space, training of staff, and in the case of digitisation, equipment and protocols. Please see relevant Archives Guide Sheets and contact the Baptist Church Archives for advice.