



Records Management for the Churchwide Organization

“Records and recordkeeping are inextricably linked with any organized activity. It is only through the information an organization records in the normal course of business that it can know what it has done and effectively plan what it will do in the future. As a key resource in the operation of any organization, records must be created, organized, secured, maintained, and used in a way that effectively supports the activity of that organization, including:

- Facilitating and sustaining day-to-day operations
- Supporting predictive activities such as budgeting and planning
- Assisting in answering questions about past decisions and activities
- Demonstrating and documenting compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and standards.”

from ARMA International, *Generally Accepted Recordkeeping Principles*

What is a records retention program?

- A records retention program is a system for identifying, organizing, and preserving the significant documents, both print and electronic, of the work of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. It also properly disposes of materials that are no longer useful.

What records are included?

- Any official records created or received during the course of ELCA business are considered to be the property of this church and not of individual employees. Records are not to be used for other purposes, removed, retained personally, or destroyed at will.

Why do we have such a program?

- A records retention system enables us easily to find records that we need, whether they were created last week, last year, or last century. The program is mandated by the [ELCA Constitution](#) (13.41.01.g) and the Church Council (CC87.6.54).

Who participates in the records management program?

- The proper care of records is everyone’s responsibility. Staff members are called upon to implement the records retention program and to use good judgment in the disposition of individual documents.

How do we participate in the program?

- Consult this manual and the accompanying **Records Retention Schedules**. The manual provides an overview of the process and answers basic questions. It can also help you organize your files. The schedules identify each category of document that your unit generates and the formats in which they should be maintained. It indicates how long they should be kept in the unit, if and for how long they should be retained in the off-site Records Center, or if they should be placed as digital files in designated inactive storage. It also identifies which records should be sent to the Archives. The Director for Records Management, or the Chief Archivist for Collections Management, will be glad to assist you with the proper care of your records and with their final disposition.



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When do we participate in the program?

- Records retention is an ongoing activity. With well organized files and regular maintenance of them, records retention is not time-consuming.
 - In addition, the Cabinet of Executives (January 9, 1990) has mandated that each unit spend one day each year reviewing its records, moving appropriate files to the Records Center or Archives, and discarding those that are no longer useful.
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Creating and Maintaining Records

You set up and maintain your files—both paper and electronic—in order to locate the information you need, when you need it, in format from which you can most easily retrieve it, and in such a way that colleagues today and in the future can easily find the information.

When directed by the *Records Retention Schedule* to do so, place copies of documents in your unit's central files. This helps coordinate the work of colleagues who are involved in the same project or program and facilitates orderly transfer of the material to the Archives.

How do I set up my files?

- Determine the most appropriate medium for maintaining your information.
 - You may find that an electronic database best serves your needs.
 - For easy searching and retrieval, you may maintain text documents in their electronic format as well as on paper. A filing plan for word processing documents should employ the same use of folders and organizational plan as you use for your paper documents.
 - The *Records Retention Schedule* alerts you to the preservation issues involved with your type of electronic data.
 - While all kinds of electronic media are useful for access to and distribution of information, rapid changes in hardware and software make this an inappropriate medium for preservation.
- Select filing schemes that reflect the primary activities you perform. Some examples:
 - I plan events.
 - I create print, audiovisual, or Web program resources.
 - I develop official documents.
 - I am responsible for an inter unit staff team on. . . .
 - I lead training workshops.
 - I maintain information from and about organizations such as synods, congregations, agencies, schools, camps, etc.
 - I answer telephone, e-mail and mailed questions on a variety of subjects.
 - I maintain files on people.



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- I manage a budget and pay bills.
 - I give grants or loans.
 - This will help you determine whether your files should be arranged
 - by subject,
 - by geographic location,
 - by organization,
 - in alphabetical order,
 - in chronological order, or
 - in numerical order.
 - When setting up the files for your various records series, refer to the *Records Retention Schedule* for a more detailed list of the types of documents which you should place in your files and to determine the final disposition of these documents.
 - Use manila folders within your hanging folders to hold paper documents which will be transferred to the Archives, as directed by the *Records Retention Schedule*. Then, when it is time to send your records to the Archives, you can quickly and accurately send the permanent files and discard materials with no lasting value. Do not send hanging folders to the Archives.
- How do I protect my paper records?**
- Duplication and dispersal of vital documents, in the same or other formats, is the most effective and economical way to protect your valuable information. Duplication and dispersal means that you are prepared to restore your information from records held at a remote location. This is the most efficient method of reconstruction, should on-site records inadvertently be destroyed by natural disaster, hardware failure, or human error or mischief.
- How can I disperse my records?**
- Send copies of minutes, governing documents, insurance policies, and similar vital records to the Archives as directed in *Records Retention Schedule*.
- How should I protect vital original documents?**
- When it is important to protect the original copy of a legal document, place it in a fire proof container and retain copies in the office for your use. Remember to send copies of contracts to the legal office in the Office of the Secretary.
- How do I protect digital records?**
- There are two critical issues regarding the safety of electronically stored data:
 1. The Department for Information Technology institutes appropriate procedures for protecting your electronic data by providing for the restoration of current information in the event of hardware failure. Do not assume that their back-up process serves as permanent storage for your data. It is designed to



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restore your files as they appear at the time of the last back-up.

2. The ELCA Constituent Information system (ECIS includes data and reports for congregations, agencies, institutions, rostered leaders, and persons using the services of the ELCA.) The ELCA constituent Information system (ECIS) will keep all data in memory and migrate forward. Reports generated by ECIS for specific programs should accompany programmatic materials to the Archives.
3. The disposition of information managed by IFAS, the financial accounting system is described in the Records Retention Schedule for Business Records

What do I do with e-mail?

- Treat routine e-mail as you would a telephone call. Log it, if necessary; delete it immediately. It takes up valuable space on our server. E-mail correspondence that contains information, policy, or attached documents should be moved to other electronic folders for future reference, use, and evaluation for archival value. It should be preserved with other correspondence for the historical collection by printing it out—together with your reply—filing it consistent with your filing scheme, and sending it to the Archives as directed in the *Records Retention Schedule*

Moving and Retrieving Records

1. ARCHIVES

Which records should I send?

- Records created or received, which represent your work for the ELCA and which may have evidential and historical value. Most of these are already identified in the *Records Retention Schedule*. The Archives will accept records in all formats except floppy disks. Records in the Archives are presumed to be available to the public for research. If sensitive material exists in your files, consult with the Archives staff about purging or placing restrictions on access to this information before you send the files.
- Maintain the existing filing scheme; place records in manila folders; and retain the folder identifications. (Do not send hanging file folders.) Box the records in cartons. Complete the [Archives Internal Transfer Form](#), found on the Web, and place one copy of the completed form in the box and another copy on top of the box. You may wish to retain a third copy for yourself.
- Call the director for Records Management at ext. 2811 to arrange transportation. Your records will be accessioned into the historical collection of the ELCA. This is a non-circulating collection.
- You may use the records in the Archives reference room, or have reasonable amounts of material photocopied and sent



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to you.

- Consult with the Director for Archives Administration about special uses of films, photographs, and artifacts.

2. Records Center

Which records should I send?

- Send boxes of inactive records, still needed for fiscal, legal, or administrative purposes, which you may need to have returned to you.

How do I prepare the records?

- Place files with similar retention dates in bankers boxes (10"X12"X15"). These may be purchased from any of our office suppliers. Since we also recycle these boxes back into use, you may call the Archives at ext. 2818 to determine if used boxes are available.
- Secure the 5-part "Records Transmittal Form" from the Director for Records Management in the Library or call ext. 2811.
- On the form, you will identify the records series, inclusive dates, ownership, expiration date, and other characteristics which will aid you in retrieving the correct box. Please type the information on the form!

How do I send the records?

- When you have completed the forms, call the Director for Records Management at ext. 2811 to label and number your boxes and arrange transportation.

How do I retrieve the Records?

- The Director for Records Management maintains a database inventory indicating the accession, circulation, and final disposition of Records Center boxes.
- You will retain one copy of the "Records Transmittal Form" for your records.
- Call ext. 2811 when you wish to retrieve your box and again when you are ready to have it returned to the Records Center.

How do I know what my unit has in the Records Center?

- You may request a print-out of your Records Center inventory at any time.

What is the final disposition of my records?

- You will be notified annually when the retention date for each box has expired. You are asked to sign the release copy of the "Records Transmittal Form." In keeping with the *Records Retention Schedule*, your records then may be transferred to the Archives, destroyed, or returned to active use in your unit. If you fail to respond, the Archives staff will make the decision.

This [Records Management Manual](#) is a companion to the *Record Retention Schedules* for [programmatic](#) and [business](#) records of the Churchwide Organization Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. © It may be reproduced provided copyright is acknowledged. (Revised April 27, 2010)