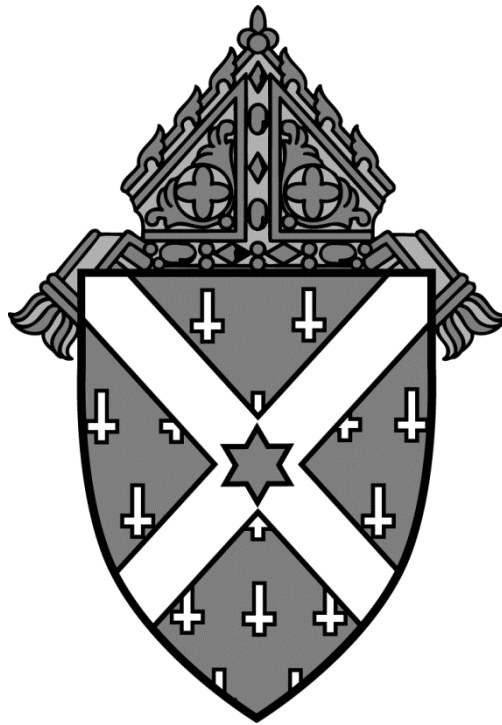


**HANDBOOK  
FOR  
SACRAMENTAL  
RECORDS**



**DIOCESE OF LITTLE ROCK**

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Matthew A. Glover, J.D., J.C.L.

Chancellor for Canonical Affairs

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Archdiocese of Cincinnati for permitting us to make use of its Handbook for Sacramental Records as a starting point and guide for our own. I would also like to acknowledge the following dioceses whose content on sacramental recording guidelines was also used in the preparation of this Handbook: Diocese of Charleston, Diocese of Beaumont, Diocese of Dallas, and Diocese of Lexington.

I would also like to thank all priests, deacons, and parish staff who gave valuable input on various aspects of this Handbook. For the final version, we have tried to address the realities of parish life in Arkansas and the practical guidance from those in parish life, while always remaining faithful to the Church's formal teachings and rules on such matters.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge and thank Mrs. Susi Blanco, Chancery Secretary, at whose initiative this Handbook first began to take shape. She has done much of the substantive research and work on this endeavor, and her years in ministry at both the parish and diocesan levels has made her input invaluable on this project.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## GENERAL NORMS

<b>Registers</b> .....	1
Required Records; Parishes, Other Institutions; Format; Computerized Records; Repair of Old Registers; Safe Storage; Reporting Loss or Destruction	
<b>Confidentiality</b> .....	2
Nature of Information; Access to Registers; Authorized Personnel; Genealogical Research	
<b>Entries</b> .....	2
Type of Data; Printing/Ink; Style for Names; Maiden Names; Style for Dates; Timeliness; Place of Entry; Chronological Order; Specific Columns; Index; Excess Data; “Sacramental Records” File; Confidential Data; Minister of the Sacrament	
<b>Certificates</b> .....	4
Definition; Church Use Only; Authorized Source of Records; Authorized Requests; Procedures for Requests; Requests from Civil Authority; Format; Authentication; Required Data; Missing Record	
<b>Changes to Entries</b> .....	6
Caution about Changes; Minor Changes; Authorization for Insubstantial Changes; Major Changes; Authorization for Substantial Changes; Permitted Changes; Non-Permitted Changes; Data in Certificates after Changes	

## BAPTISM REGISTER

<b>Entries</b> .....	8
Source of Data; Recipients from More Than One Parish; Emergency and Other Baptisms Outside Parish Church; Additional Notations; Conditional Baptism; Reception into Full Communion; Previous Marriage of Person Coming Into the Church; Unmarried and Adopting Parents; Baptism after Adoption; Adoption of a Baptized Child; Number of Godparents; Proxy Godparents; Christian Witness; Ascription to Proper Church Sui Iuris; Centralized Baptismal Records	
<b>Changes to Entries</b> .....	11
Most Changes Occur in Baptism Registers; Changes to Original Data; Additions To “Notations” Column; Defection from Church; Style for Notation	

## **CONFIRMATION REGISTER**

<b>Entries</b> .....	12
Source of Data; Large Groups of Recipients; Recipients from More Than One Parish; Baptismal Certificates; Baptism Data; Notification of Church of Baptism	

## **MARRIAGE REGISTER**

<b>Entries</b> .....	13
Source of Data; Marriage Outside Parish Church; Convalidation; Sanation; Previous Marriage of Person Coming Into the Church; Notation of Dispensation; Notification of Annulment; Notification of Church of Baptism	

<b>Preuptial Files</b> .....	14
Contents; Location; Filing; Retention; Transmission of Files	

## **DEATH REGISTER**

<b>Entries</b> .....	15
Source of Data; Cremation; Notification of Church of Baptism	

<b>ENDNOTES</b> .....	16
-----------------------	----

<b>CANON LAW REGARDING THE RECORDING OF SACRAMENTS</b> .....	18
--	----

<b>APPENDIX A: HOW SPANISH LAST NAMES WORK</b> .....	21
--	----

<b>APPENDIX B: HOW VIETNAMESE NAMES WORK</b> .....	23
--	----

<b>APPENDIX C: REQUEST FOR BAPTISMAL SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE</b> .....	24
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## **APPENDIX D: SAMPLE BAPTISM REGISTER**

# FOREWORD

by

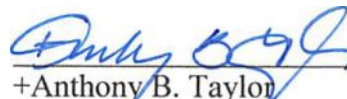
Most Rev. Anthony B. Taylor

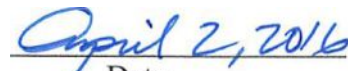
The grace of the sacraments nourishes a strong and joyful faith. Sacramental records testify to the powerful presence of God in our lives. For this reason it is important to keep accurate and well preserved records of the sacraments received by the people of God.

This Handbook for Sacramental Records is intended to help diocesan and parish personnel satisfy this serious obligation. It is also designed to assure consistent record keeping throughout the diocese. While it is not being promulgated as particular law, I do expect that its provisions will be observed. Of course, the dictates of universal law always apply.

The Handbook does not cover every complexity of sacramental record keeping. Sometimes the answer to a question will require looking in more than one place in the Handbook. Doubtful situations may still require consultation with the Chancery.

I am grateful to those who prepared this Handbook and to those who will use it wisely in the service of God's people. We express appreciation to the Archdiocese of Cincinnati who made available their own Handbook as a guide.

  
+Anthony B. Taylor  
Bishop of Little Rock

  
Date

# GENERAL NORMS

(cc. 535, 876, 894)

## REGISTERS

- Required Records* Each parish is required to maintain records of baptisms, confirmations, receptions into full communion, marriages, and deaths.<sup>1</sup> Maintaining records of first communions is optional.
- Parishes, Other Institutions* Generally only parishes are to maintain sacramental records and registers. Non-parochial institutions must obtain the express approval of the Bishop to maintain sacramental records and registers.<sup>2</sup>
- Format* Special registers that are designed for sacramental records are required. Sacramental registers are permanent records. Care should be taken to purchase registers that are of high quality and strong binding. A parish may retain separate Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage, and Death registers or combined registers, depending on the needs of the parish. Each register should be clearly marked. The front page of the register is to include the type of registry, the name of the parish or mission, the city, and the range of dates in the register. The pages of the register should be made of acid-free paper.
- Computerized Records* Sacramental records may be kept on computer, but a complete record must be maintained in the registers, and the original handwritten registers themselves are never to be destroyed or discarded. The registers are considered the only authentic copy of sacramental records.
- Repair of Old Registers* As registers become worn, they are to be rebound by a professional binder. Only if a register is beyond repair may the records be transferred to a new register. The original register is to be retained in as safe a condition as possible.
- Safe Storage* The sacramental registers are to be maintained and preserved in such a way as to assure their reliability, permanence, accuracy, and authenticity. The sacramental registers are to be stored together in a locked place, preferably one which is fire-proof or fire resistant. They may be removed only by authorized personnel and only for legitimate purposes. The registers may never be taken off the parish premises except with permission from the Chancery.

*Reporting Loss or Destruction*      The loss or destruction of any sacramental register should be reported *immediately* to the Chancery.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

*Nature of Information*      Care must be taken to protect people’s privacy. Although sacramental registers contain information about public events and other facts readily known to any interested party, they also contain information that is very personal and confidential.

*Access to Registers*      The sacramental registers belong to the individual parish. They are maintained for the good of the Christian faithful, but they are private documents, not public ones. No one other than the pastor can claim a right to direct access to the registers.

*Authorized Personnel*      The pastor is always and ultimately responsible for the care and confidentiality of the sacramental registers themselves as well as any reproductions (c. 535 §1). He may designate other persons to make entries in the registers and to prepare certificates. These may be employees or volunteers, but their number should be very small. These designated persons must be well known to the pastor, must be capable of careful work and protecting confidentiality, and must be adequately trained to work with the registers. Their work with the registers is not to exceed their mandate from the pastor (c. 877)

*Genealogical Research*      Sacramental registers should never be made available to genealogical researchers. The pastor or other regularly designated persons may research information requested as time permits and should make the information available on separate paper. It may be appropriate to ask for a donation to help defray the administrative costs associated with such research. Care must be taken not to disclose confidential information.

## **ENTRIES**

*Type of Data*      All and only that data required by canon law and otherwise necessary for the complete and accurate maintenance of sacramental records is to be entered in the sacramental registers.

*Printing/Ink*      Entries must be legible. Information should be entered in neatly printed letters, not cursive handwriting. A good quality pen should be used, preferably black, fade-proof/water-proof ink. Do not use pencil, colored ink, or felt-tipped markers.

<i>Style for Names</i>	<p>Entries are to include full names. The last and first names are to be spelled out, and at least the middle initial is to be included. The last name of the entry's subject should be printed in upper case, e.g., "JONES."</p> <p>Abbreviations, nicknames, or other informalities are not to be used. (<i>See Appendix A and B for additional guidance on entries of Spanish and Vietnamese names</i>)</p>
<i>Maiden Names</i>	<p>It is recommended that a woman's maiden name (her last name/surname at time of birth) should be used for all sacramental records. For adult baptisms and receptions into the Church, the name of the spouse, date, and place of marriage should be noted in the "Notations" column.</p>
<i>Style for Dates</i>	<p>Printing the name of the month is preferred to using the month's number (e.g. "Aug." rather than "8").</p>
<i>Timeliness</i>	<p>Entries should be made as soon as possible after the event to be recorded.</p>
<i>Place of Entry</i>	<p>As a general rule, the proper parish for the recording of the sacraments and deaths is the parish in whose territory the sacraments or rites of Christian burial were celebrated.</p>
<i>Chronological Order</i>	<p>Entries should be made in chronological order. If the chronological order cannot be kept in some particular case, a small note should be made in the proper chronological location in the register cross-referencing the actual entry, e.g. "See JONES, page ____."</p>
<i>Specific Columns</i>	<p>Each page of the register has several columns, and each column is titled. It is important to enter the data in the proper columns. The registers should have a column titled "Remarks" or "Notations," or some something similar. We will refer to this column throughout this handbook.<sup>3</sup></p>
<i>Index</i>	<p>Every entry is to be listed in the register's index, according to the person's last name.</p>
<i>Excess Data</i>	<p>If there is inadequate space for all the data to be entered, the excess data may be entered elsewhere on the same page or even on a different page of the register. Clear cross-referencing is essential, e.g., "See SMITH, bottom of page ____." (<i>See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register</i>)</p>
<i>"Sacramental Records" File</i>	<p>Related information should not be written in sacramental registers. Such material or related documents (e.g., civil records, correspondence) should be retained securely in a file in the parish archives. However, discretion must be exercised in deciding which material to place in this file; not</p>



everything has to be retained. This file should be marked “Sacramental Records,” and the words “See Sacramental Records File” should be printed in the “Notations” column of the sacramental register. (*See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register*)

*Confidential Data* Data that is confidential and that is not to be included on certificates is to be so marked when entered in the register: “Confidential – do not include on certificate.” However, the provisions of Canon 535 §2 are to be observed. (*See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register*)

*Minister of the Sacrament* The one who administered or witnessed the sacrament should sign the entry in the register. However, the actual minister of a sacrament does not need to sign the register if the person making the entry witnessed the event or has available a document (e.g., Sacristy Record of Baptism) signed by the minister certifying the conferral of the sacrament. In these cases the name of the minister is printed in the register.

## **CERTIFICATES**

*Definition* A certificate is an official document certifying that a particular individual has received a sacrament. It is an exact duplicate of data already entered in a sacramental register.

*Church Use Only* Certificates of sacraments are intended primarily for internal church use, not for civil purposes.<sup>4</sup>

*Authorized Source of Records* Only the parish or other location holding the original sacramental record may issue a certificate.<sup>5</sup> Only the actual register, rather than a computer record, should be used in preparing certificates.

*Authorized Requests* Any member of the Christian faithful has a right to obtain a certificate of a sacrament he or she has received and that was recorded in a sacramental register—but only that person, the parents of a minor, or someone with legal guardianship of another have this right. When the parents of a child are separated or divorced, both parents, regardless of legal custody, are presumed to have the right to a certificate.

Routine requests for records for canonical purposes between and among parishes, diocesan chancery offices or tribunals can be completed without permission of the individual.

*Procedures for Requests* Requests for certificates should be submitted in writing or in person. Telephone requests from Catholic parishes or diocesan departments are

acceptable. No information from sacramental registers should be provided by telephone or other electronic means except to another Catholic parish or other Catholic agency. Even then care for the privacy of persons is to be exercised.

*Requests from  
Civil Authority*

If information from parish registers is requested by a civil authority (e.g., law enforcement, court official, lawyer, etc.), the person requesting the information should be directed to contact the Chancellor for Canonical Affairs.

*Format*

Certificates should have an official appearance and should be issued in a consistent format. Parishes may obtain blank certificates from commercial vendors or design their own, as long as all information and notations are included in the format. All certificates must bear the name and address of the parish.

*Authentication*

Certificates may be purchased or created by individual parishes, but they must contain the appropriate fields for all necessary information. They are to be signed by the pastor, [associate pastor,] pastoral administrator, [or the assigned deacon] and impressed with the parish seal. Photocopies and faxed or scanned copies of certificates are not considered authentic documents.

*Required Data*

Certificates are to include all data contained in the sacramental register, except that which is marked confidential or is extraneous to the person's canonical status. Data in the "Notations" column is to be included. If there is no data in the "Notations" column, the words "No Notations" should be printed on the certificate.

*Missing Record*

When a requested record of baptism cannot be found, the Chancery should be contacted so that a search of the diocesan records can be made. If no record can be found, Canon 876 can be applied and the record can be recreated with appropriate proof. Appropriate proof may include: affidavits from the individual/parent and/or two witnesses; an affidavit or letter from the priest or deacon who administered the sacrament; photographs or videos. Please contact the Chancery office for guidance on specific situations.

In the case of the baptism of an adult, the oath of the individual or declaration of a single witness is all the evidence required (c. 876).

Only that data which can be vouched for with certainty should be entered in the register, even though this may leave an incomplete entry. The name

of the witness, the date of his or her testimony and the words “Based on the testimony of ...” should be printed in the “Notations” column of the register. Supporting documentation is to be kept in the “Sacramental Records” file and a cross reference included in the notations of the entry. (See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)

## CHANGES TO ENTRIES

- Caution about Changes* Once entered into a sacramental register, data is considered official and permanent. It may not be modified except under special conditions as detailed below. Original data should never be scratched out, erased, “whited out,” or otherwise destroyed or obliterated.
- Minor Changes* Minor changes (e.g., correcting a misspelling) may be made directly to the original entry. Such changes are made by drawing a straight, simple line through the word, numbers or letter to be changed, and printing the change immediately above or below it. ( See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)
- Authorization for Insubstantial Changes* An insubstantial error (e.g., misspelling) may be corrected upon request of those persons who have a right to a certificate (See CERTIFICATES, Authorized Requests, above.)
- Major Changes* Major changes (e.g., to record an adoption after baptism) may require that a new entry be created. In these cases, the original entry is to be preserved without change; a new entry, with all the data from the original entry reproduced (except the relevant change or changes), is to be made in the same register as close to the original entry as possible. Both entries, as well as the listings in the index, are to be cross-referenced; “Do Not Issue from This Record” is to be printed carefully across the face of the original entry. (See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)
- Authorization for Substantial Changes* More significant errors and other changes require authentic supporting documentation. Such documentation will ordinarily consist of any original, “raised seal” certificate from a civil or ecclesiastical office, court, agency, etc. The issuing agency, date of the certificate, and any protocol number should be printed in the “Notations” column of the register. When an error involves data pertaining directly to the celebration of a sacrament or rite of Christian burial (e.g., date, identity of godparent) such that no external verifying documentation exists, the written or oral testimony of a reputable witness will suffice.

<i>Permitted Changes</i>	Some <i>permitted</i> changes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- correct name</li> <li>- correct date</li> <li>- correct spelling</li> <li>- new legal name</li> <li>- adoptive parent(s)</li> </ul>
<i>Non-Permitted Changes</i>	Some <i>non-permitted</i> changes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- new godparents or sponsors<sup>6</sup></li> <li>- non-adoptive stepparents</li> <li>- customary name or nickname</li> </ul>
<i>Data in Certificates After Changes</i>	Once specific data has been changed in the sacramental register, the original data is not transcribed onto certificates (e.g., the natural parent's name after adoption).	

# BAPTISM REGISTER

(cc. 874, 877, 878)

## ENTRIES

### *Source of Data*

Ordinarily, the data used to create a record of baptism (as required by c. 877 § 1) originates on a “Sacristy Record,” a small form from a pre-printed pad sold by commercial vendors, or other similar form. The Sacristy Record is filled out either by someone in the parish office at the time the baptism is scheduled, by a member of the baptism preparation team during the catechetical program, or by the minister of baptism at the time of the actual baptism. Before the data is transferred to the Baptism Register, a parent, guardian or adult candidate should verify the data written on the Sacristy Record (usually at the time of baptism), and the minister must sign the Sacristy Record verifying that the sacrament was conferred. There should be a clear procedure in place for assuring that the data is transferred from the Sacristy Record to the Baptism Register as quickly as possible.

### *Recipients from More Than One Parish*

When persons from more than one parish are baptized or received into full communion with the Catholic Church at a single ceremony, it is preferred that the record for all the persons be retained at the parish where the rites are celebrated.

### *Emergency and Other Baptisms Outside Parish Church*

In the exceptionally rare situation where a priest or deacon has received permission to perform the full rite of baptism in a chapel, hospital, or home, the minister is to see that the requisite data is transmitted in writing to the parish in whose territory the baptism took place for recording in the Baptism Register.

In the situation when emergency baptism is conferred (that is, with any person celebrating the bare matter and form of baptism when the recipient is in danger of death), the minister or some other witness is to notify the parish in whose territory the baptism took place. The emergency baptism is to be recorded in that parish’s Baptism Register.

To complete the rite, the pastor of the recipient of the emergency baptism should celebrate the Rite of Bringing a Baptized Child to the Church (properly adapted in the case of an adult recipient). The event is to be recorded in the Baptism Register with a notation of “Rites Supplied,” along with the date, place and minister of the emergency baptism in the “Notations” column. The same procedure should be followed when a person is baptized “privately” by a lay person, even though there is no danger of death. (*See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register*)

<i>Additional Notations</i>	Notations of the reception of other sacraments are also to be included in the Baptism Register. Even if these sacraments are conferred at the same parish, the notations are to be recorded in the Baptism Register. Additional notations may include: religious profession, marriage, annulments, ordination, laicization, change of rite, and dispensation from vows. <i>(See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)</i>
<i>Conditional Baptism</i>	When conditional baptism is conferred, “Baptized conditionally” is to be written in the “Notations” column. Otherwise the entry is same as for any baptism. <i>(See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)</i>
<i>Reception into Full Communion</i>	When persons are received into full communion with the Catholic Church, after having been baptized previously in another Christian community, an entry must be made in the Baptism Register as well as in the Confirmation Register. The data concerning the Rite of Reception should be entered in the spaces provided for the baptismal data. The words “PoF-fully initiated” should be entered in the “Notations” column, along with the date and place of the original baptism. If the person coming into the Church is married, then the name of the spouse, the date and the place of marriage should also be entered in the “Notations” column. <i>(See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)</i>
	Special care must be taken to follow this procedure to record when children under the age of 7 are received into full communion along with their parents, even though there may be no ritual involving the children (i.e., when the parents make the profession of faith on behalf of their children). <i>(See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)</i>
<i>Previous marriage of person coming into the Church</i>	The previous civil or non-Catholic marriage of a person being baptized or received into full communion with the Catholic Church is to be placed in the Baptism Register of the person’s baptismal/profession of faith record in the “Notations” column. <i>(See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)</i>
<i>Unmarried and Adopting Parents</i>	It is important that the provisions of c. 877 concerning unmarried parents, adoptive parents, and natural parents be followed. It is unjust to enter unauthorized names of parents in the Baptism Register. The expression “Pater ignotus” (Father unknown) is not be used in the register or on any certificates. <i>(See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register)</i>
<i>Baptism After Adoption</i>	When a child is baptized after adoption, ordinarily no reference to the adoption or the natural parents is to be made in the Baptism Register. Any such data that has been recorded is to be treated as confidential and is not to be included on any certificate.

<i>Adoption of a Baptized Child</i>	For children adopted <i>after</i> baptism by new parents or by a step-parent, the following notations shall be added to the baptismal register, but only after the adoption has been finalized and the official court document is received. At the original entry of the child’s baptism, parentheses shall be placed around the name(s) of the natural parent(s) and around the child’s former surname. A new entry should be made with the name(s) of the adoptive parent(s), the child’s new legal surname, the date and place of baptism, and the name of the minister who conferred the sacrament. The names of the sponsor(s) shall not be given, and no mention of the fact of adoption shall be made on the baptismal certificate. Both entries, as well as the listings in the index, are to be cross-referenced; “Do Not Issue from This Record” is to be printed carefully across the face of the original entry. (See GENERAL NORMS, Changes to Entries, <i>Major Changes</i> , and <i>Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register</i> )
<i>Number of Godparents</i>	No more than two names may be entered in the “Godparents” or “Sponsors” column; only one male and/or one female (c. 873).
<i>Proxy Godparent</i>	When a godparent or sponsor appoints a proxy to participate in the rite of baptism, both names should be entered in the register, with “Proxy” written after the name of the person who functions as proxy. (See <i>Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register</i> )
<i>Christian Witness</i>	When someone serves as a witness to baptism rather than as a godparent, in accord with c. 874 §2, the words “Christian Witness” should be placed after the witness’s name in the register. A Catholic who is ineligible to serve as a godparent may not serve as a Christian Witness. (See <i>Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register</i> )
<i>Ascription to Proper Church Sui Iuris</i>	Ascription to another church <i>sui iuris</i> (e.g., Byzantine, Maronite) is determined by the rite of the parents, not the rite of the minister or parish of baptism, unless the person is 14 years of age or older. In any case involving an Eastern Catholic, please consult the Chancery Office. <sup>7</sup>
<i>Centralized Baptismal Records</i>	The Chancery Office maintains a centralized record of baptisms in the diocese. Each parish should periodically send a record of baptisms celebrated at the parish, but must do so <i>at least annually</i> . For information on the format to be used to send the baptismal records, contact the Chancery Office.

## CHANGES TO ENTRIES

- Most Changes Occur in Baptism Registers*      The baptismal record is the primary sacramental record for Catholics. It serves as a log for all the significant, public developments in one's relationship with the Church. As a result, most changes to entries will be made in the Baptism Register. (*See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register*)
- Changes to Original Data*      Some of these changes are actual modifications of the original data entered for baptism, e.g., changes of name or change of parent. Directions for making such changes can be found in the GENERAL NORMS section of this handbook.
- Additions to "Notations" Column*      Some changes may include additions to the "Notations" column. For example, when a Catholic is confirmed, married, or ordained, the churches where these sacraments are celebrated notify the church of baptism, so that the new sacraments can be noted in the Baptism Register.<sup>8</sup> Also, when a marriage is declared null by an ecclesiastical tribunal, the tribunal will notify the church of baptism so that a notation can be made in the person's baptismal record. (*See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register*)
- Defection from Church*      If a parish receives a notice from an individual or a church indicating that the person is no longer a Catholic and even asking that his or her name be removed from Catholic church records, while it is appropriate to remove the person's name from the parish membership rolls, no changes are made to the sacramental records.<sup>9</sup> Reunion with the Church should be noted if the parish of baptism is made aware of the reunion.
- Style for Notations*      The notations mentioned in the preceding paragraphs should be made neatly and succinctly in the "Notations" column. Names, dates, places, and protocol numbers are usually the only information needed. These notations are not confidential and should ordinarily be included on certificates.



# CONFIRMATION REGISTER

(cc. 894, 895, 896)

## ENTRIES

- Source of Data* When a large number of persons is to be confirmed, it is essential that one person be designated to collect the necessary information and see to it that it is communicated accurately to the parish for proper recording in the Confirmation Register.
- Large Group of Recipients* When several persons are confirmed at the same ceremony by the same minister, the date of conferral and the name of the minister may be written only once in the register, so long as it is clear that the references apply to all the confirmed. If there is more than one minister at a single ceremony, the record should show clearly which ministers confirmed which recipients.
- Recipients from More Than One Parish* When confirmation is conferred upon persons from several parishes at one ceremony, all records are made at the parish where confirmation was celebrated.
- Baptismal Certificate* In order to satisfy the obligation of notifying the parish of baptism about the conferral of confirmation, a baptismal certificate for each candidate for confirmation should be obtained in advance of the celebration of confirmation.<sup>10</sup>
- Baptism Data* It is recommended that the place and date of baptism be noted in the Confirmation Register. (This can be especially helpful when a person has difficulty locating a baptismal record later in life.)
- Notification of Church of Baptism* The pastor of the parish where the confirmation took place should send the notification to the church of baptism as soon as possible. The notification is to include the name of the recipient and the date of baptism, as well as the place and date of confirmation. The names of the minister, parents, and sponsor are not required.
- When a person previously baptized in another Christian faith is received into full communion and confirmed, a notification is not sent to the church of baptism.

# MARRIAGE REGISTER

(cc. 1121, 1122, 1123)

## ENTRIES

<i>Source of Data</i>	The priest or deacon who assists at a marriage is responsible for communicating the necessary information to the parish where the marriage was celebrated. The premarital file ordinarily contains all the necessary information and should be retained at the parish where the marriage was celebrated.
<i>Marriage Outside Parish Church</i>	When a marriage is celebrated in a location other than a parish church (e.g., a chapel), the proper parish for the marriage record is the one in which that location stands. In the Diocese of Little Rock, wedding ceremonies may not be celebrated in parks, gardens, homes, secular places, or so-called “wedding chapels.” The only exception is with a dispensation from the canonical form: in that situation the proper parish for the marriage record is the parish of the Catholic party or the parish where the couple was prepared for marriage.
<i>Convalidation</i>	When a marriage is convalidated, the data concerning the convalidation is to be placed in the usual columns. The word “convalidation” is to be noted in the “Notations” column.
<i>Sanation</i>	When a marriage is sanated, the data concerning the original ceremony is to be placed in the usual columns. The date, diocese, and protocol number of the sanation are to be noted in the “Notations” column.
<i>Previous Marriage of Person Coming Into the Church</i>	See BAPTISM REGISTER, <i>Previous Marriage of Person Coming into the Church</i> .
<i>Notation of Dispensation</i>	When a dispensation is granted prior to marriage, the type of dispensation is to be noted in the “Notations” column (i.e., Disparity of Cult, Mixed Religion, Canonical Form, or Other). In the case of Other, a brief description of the dispensation granted should be added.
<i>Notification of Annulment</i>	When a notification is received that a marriage has been declared null, the notation “Declared invalid by (name of diocese)” along with the date and protocol number are to be noted in the “Notations” column. Any special recording instructions contained in the notification are to be followed.
<i>Notification of Church of Baptism</i>	When the marriage of a Catholic is celebrated, convalidated or sanated, the pastor of the parish where the record of marriage is retained must notify the church of baptism as soon as possible. This notification is to

include the names of the spouses and the date and place of the wedding, convalidation, or sanation. The names of the official and the witnesses are not required.

In our diocese the Chancery Office issues notifications for the churches of baptism and sends notifications for churches of baptism within the U.S. to the parish where the marriage is to take place, along with the Status of Documents and the Certificate of Marriage. After the marriage takes place, the parish should then send the notification to the church of baptism. For churches of baptism outside the U.S., the Chancery Office sends out the notifications once the Certificate of Marriage is received from the parish where the marriage took place.

## **PRENUPTIAL FILES**

<i>Contents</i>	Each parish is required to maintain a file of the papers collected during the period of marriage preparation. The file typically will include the prenuptial questionnaire, Catholic baptism certificates, proof of NFP and marriage preparation, FOCCUS forms, correspondence, notes and the Status of Documents. For convalidations, a copy of the parties' civil marriage certificate should be retained. In cases of the death of a prior spouse, the file should contain a copy of the death certificate. If there are any annulments, a copy of each final decree should be retained.
<i>Location</i>	Ordinarily, the prenuptial file for each couple should be retained by the parish where the marriage is recorded in the Marriage Register.
<i>Filing</i>	The file for each couple is to be kept in its own envelope or folder, clearly marked with the parties' names and the date of marriage. The files should be arranged in chronological order and kept together in a locked file cabinet or safe.
<i>Retention</i>	The premarital files are to be retained for sixty years or until both parties have died. Expired files are to be destroyed or otherwise disposed of so that no one can gain access to them.
<i>Transmission of File</i>	If a legitimate request for the original copy of the file is made by an ecclesiastical tribunal or if the Chancellor has approved the surrender of the file to a civil authority, the file should be hand delivered and receipted or mailed by registered mail with a receipt. A photocopy of the original file, along with the receipt, should replace the original copy in the parish's archive. If the original file is later returned, the photo copy should be destroyed.

# DEATH REGISTER

(c. 1182)

## ENTRIES

- Source of Data*            The data needed for the Death Register is ordinarily provided by the funeral director.
- Cremation*                When the body has been cremated, no reference to the date or place of cremation is made in the Death Register. However, the fact of cremation should be noted as well as the date and place of the ashes' interment.
- Notification of  
Church of Baptism*        No notice of death needs to be sent to the church of baptism.

# ENDNOTES

1. Even when a priest serves as pastor of more than one parish, separate registers are to be maintained for each parish. For security and convenience, however, the registers may all be stored at one of the parishes. The Chancery should be notified of the storage of registers out of the parish.
2. If a chapel or pastoral center operates under the authority of the local pastor, its sacramental records should be kept in the parish registers rather than separately.
3. For the sake of convenience this column will be referred to as the “Notations” column throughout the handbook.
4. Since certain data is entered in the sacramental registers based purely on the word of someone else (e.g., the date of birth of someone being baptized), the certificate is simply repeating that data but not certifying it as true.
5. When a parish closes or merges, formal arrangements are made with the Chancery for the transfer and retention of its sacramental registers. Contact the Chancery for the location of sacramental registers of former institutions.
6. The names of godparents or sponsors are not to be changed simply because they have died or because a parent feels they are no longer suitable. In these situations, parents can informally ask someone else to serve in this role without making a change in the permanent record or on certificates. Under certain circumstances, a substitute sponsor can be appointed by the Bishop. (*See Appendix C: Request for Baptismal Sponsor Substitute, and Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register*)
7. Latin priests and deacons do not automatically have the faculty to baptize persons who by law are ascribed to an Eastern Catholic Church. If it is determined that one or both of the parents are ascribed to an Eastern Catholic Church, contact should be made with the Chancery before the celebration of baptism. Similar requirements apply to Orthodox Christians who are received into full communion with the Catholic Church.
8. Some parishes still give notice of First Communion, although this is no longer required. When a marriage is celebrated at a place other than the place where its record is maintained, both places should be noted in the “Notations” column. (*See Appendix D: Sample Baptism Register*)

9. Such situations may call for a letter to the individual explaining the parish's actions and inviting the person to return to full communion at any time in the future.
  
10. There are some additional reasons for obtaining a baptismal certificate: 1) the fact of valid baptism and Catholicity will be established; 2) any previous reception of valid confirmation, especially in the case of Catholics who were baptized in uniate Eastern churches, will be uncovered; 3) any discrepancies between name and parentage provided in the Baptismal Register and given at the time of confirmation will be discovered; 4) the identity of baptismal godparents can be ascertained, pursuant to Canon 893 §2.

# CANON LAW REGARDING THE RECORDING OF SACRAMENTS

Can. 535 §1. Each parish is to have parochial registers, that is, those of baptisms, marriages, deaths, and others as prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop. The pastor is to see to it that these registers are accurately inscribed and carefully preserved.

§2. In the baptismal register are also to be noted confirmation and those things which pertain to the canonical status of the Christian faithful by reason of marriage, without prejudice to the prescript of can. 1133, of adoption, of the reception of sacred orders, of perpetual profession made in a religious institute, and of change of rite. These notations are always to be noted on a baptismal certificate.

§3. Each parish is to have its own seal. Documents regarding the canonical status of the Christian faithful and all acts which can have juridic importance are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and sealed with the parochial seal.

§5. Older parochial registers are also to be carefully protected according to the precepts of particular law.

Can. 872. Insofar as possible, a person to be baptized is to be given a sponsor who assists an adult in Christian initiation or together with the parents presents an infant for baptism. A sponsor also helps the baptized person to lead a Christian life in keeping with baptism and to fulfill faithfully the obligations inherent in it.

Can. 873. There is to be only one male sponsor or one female sponsor or one of each.

Can. 874 §1. To be permitted to take on the function of sponsor a person must:

1/ be designated by the one to be baptized, by the parents or the person who takes their place, or in their absence by the pastor or minister and have the aptitude and intention of fulfilling this function;

2/ have completed the sixteenth year of age, unless the diocesan bishop has established another age, or the pastor or minister has granted an exception for a just cause;

3/ be a Catholic who has been confirmed and has already received the most holy sacrament of the Eucharist and who leads a life of faith in keeping with the function to be taken on;

4/ not be bound by any canonical penalty legitimately imposed or declared;

5/ not be the father or mother of the one to be baptized.

§2. A baptized person who belongs to a non-Catholic ecclesial community is not to participate except together with a Catholic sponsor and then only as a witness of the baptism.

Can. 876. To prove the conferral of baptism, if prejudicial to no one, the declaration of one witness beyond all exception is sufficient or the oath of the one baptized if the person received baptism as an adult.

Can. 877 §1. The pastor of the place where the baptism is celebrated must carefully and without any delay record in the baptismal register the names of the baptized, with mention made of the minister, parents, sponsors, witnesses, if any, the place and date of the conferral of the baptism, and the date and place of birth.

§2. If it concerns a child born to an unmarried mother, the name of the mother must be inserted, if her maternity is established publicly or if she seeks it willingly in writing or before two witnesses. Moreover, the name of the father must be inscribed if a public document or his own declaration before the pastor and two witnesses proves his paternity; in other cases, the name of the baptized is inscribed with no mention of the name of the father or the parents.

§3. If it concerns an adopted child, the names of those adopting are to be inscribed and, at least if it is done in the civil records of the region, also the names of the natural parents according to the norm of §§1 and 2, with due regard for the prescripts of the conference of bishops.

Can. 878. If the baptism was not administered by the pastor or in his presence, the minister of baptism, whoever it is, must inform the pastor of the parish in which it was administered of the conferral of the baptism, so that he records the baptism according to the norm of can. 877, §1.

Can. 892. Insofar as possible, there is to be a sponsor for the person to be confirmed; the sponsor is to take care that the confirmed person behaves as a true witness of Christ and faithfully fulfills the obligations inherent in this sacrament.

Can. 893 §1. To perform the function of sponsor, a person must fulfill the conditions mentioned in can. 874.

§2. It is desirable to choose as sponsor the one who undertook the same function in baptism.

Can. 894. To prove the conferral of confirmation the prescripts of can. 876 are to be observed.

Can. 895. The names of those confirmed with mention made of the minister, the parents and sponsors, and the place and date of the conferral of confirmation are to be recorded in the confirmation register of the diocesan curia or, where the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop has prescribed it, in a register kept in the parish archive. The pastor must inform the pastor of the place of baptism about the conferral of confirmation so that a notation is made in the baptismal register according to the norm of can. 535, §2.



Can. 896. If the pastor of the place was not present, the minister either personally or through another is to inform him as soon as possible of the conferral of confirmation.

Can. 1121 §1. After a marriage has been celebrated, the pastor of the place of the celebration or the person who takes his place, even if neither assisted at the marriage, is to note as soon as possible in the marriage register the names of the spouses, the person who assisted, and the witnesses, and the place and date of the celebration of the marriage according to the method prescribed by the conference of bishops or the diocesan bishop.

Can. 1122 §1. The contracted marriage is to be noted also in the baptismal registers in which the baptism of the spouses has been recorded.

§2. If a spouse did not contract marriage in the parish in which the person was baptized, the pastor of the place of the celebration is to send notice of the marriage which has been entered into as soon as possible to the pastor of the place of the conferral of baptism.

Can. 1123. Whenever a marriage is either convalidated in the external forum, declared null, or legitimately dissolved other than by death, the pastor of the place of the celebration of the marriage must be informed so that a notation is properly made in the marriage and baptismal registers.

Can. 1182. When the burial has been completed, a record is to be made in the register of deaths according to the norm of particular law.

## APPENDIX A: HOW SPANISH NAMES WORK

Care should be taken with Spanish names and surnames when recording sacramental records. The matter of Spanish last names or surnames (*apellidos*) might seem confusing at first, but that's mostly because it's different to the way last names are traditionally handled in the U.S.

The basic rule of Spanish surnames is fairly simple: In general, a person born into a Spanish-speaking family is given a first name followed by two surnames, the first surname being the father's family name (his father's first surname) followed by the mother's family name (the mother's first surname).

Take as an example the name of Maria Teresa García Sanchez. Maria Teresa is the name given at birth, García is the family name from her father, and Sanchez is the family name from her mother.

*Father*=Jose **García** Ramirez    *Mother*=Maria **Sanchez** Hernandez

↓

↓

*Child* = Maria Teresa **García Sanchez**

If Maria Teresa García Sanchez marries Juan Arroyo López, she doesn't change her name. But it would be common for her to add "de Arroyo" (literally, "of Arroyo") at the end.

Since things can get a bit complicated for Spanish-speaking people living in the U.S. where it is not the norm to use two family names, some decide that all family members should use just the father's paternal family name. Another option is to hyphenate the two surnames names, e.g., Juan Arroyo-López and Maria Teresa García-Sanchez.

Two surnames can often cause confusion when, not being aware of how Spanish surnames work, the first surname is taken as the person's middle name and the second (mother's) surname taken as the last name. Not understanding how Spanish names and surnames work is the reason Spanish-speaking persons in the U.S. often have difficulties caused by their names and surnames being handled incorrectly.

Most Spanish-speaking people do not use middle names the way we usually do in the U.S. (i.e., a name we rarely use or use only as an initial). They often have both a first name (*primer nombre*) and a second name (*segundo nombre*), and they use both. So you have names like *Juan Miguel*, *Maria Teresa* or *Jose Luis*. It is similar to compound first names in the U.S. like Billy Joe, Rose Ann, Mary Jane, etc. For women, in addition to compound first names you also have first names that come from names for Mary: Maria de la Luz, Maria del Rosario or Maria de Jesus. Maria de la Luz may go by Maria or by Luz but should be addressed with the whole name. Ma. is commonly used abbreviation for Maria. A woman named Maria Guadalupe may go by Maria or Guadalupe or just Lupe. Jose Guadalupe and Jose Maria are both common names for men. Men

can also have names with *de*, like Jose de Jesus. So when recording Spanish names put the whole name (Maria Teresa) in the spot for the first name, and both surnames (Garcia Sanchez) in the place for the last name.

To ensure proper recording of sacraments it is highly recommended that a birth certificate be used to ensure the correct handling and spelling of the data required for a baptismal record. For all subsequent sacraments, the data from the baptismal certificate should be used.

## APPENDIX B: HOW VIETNAMESE NAMES WORK

Vietnamese names put the family name first followed by the middle and given names. Take Pham Van Duc, for example: Pham is the family name or what we call the last name. Van is the individual's middle name, and Duc is the given or first name. Vietnam has about 300 family or clan names. The most common are Le, Pham, Tran, Ngo, Vu, Do, Dao, Duong, Dang, Dinh, Hoang and Nguyen—the Vietnamese equivalent of Smith.

The family name, positioned first, is passed on by the father to his children. It is estimated that there are around one hundred family names in common use, although some are far more common than others. The name *Nguyễn* is estimated to be used by almost 40% of the Vietnamese population. The top three names are so popular because the king would sometimes grant people the privilege of using the family name of the king, to reward their loyalty. Over many generations, the family names became permanent. In Vietnamese cultural practice, women always keep their family names once they marry, just as in other East Asian cultures.

The most common family names among the Vietnamese are the following (added together these 14 names account for 90% of the people):

Nguyễn, Trần, Lê, Phạm, Huỳnh/Hoàng, Phan, Vũ/Võ, Đặng, Bùi, Đỗ, Hồ, Ngô, Dương, Lý

Most Vietnamese have one middle name, but it is quite possible to have two or more, or even no middle names at all. In the past, the middle name was selected by parents from a fairly narrow range of options. Almost all women had *Thị* as their middle name, and many men had *Văn*. More recently, a broader range of names have been used, and people named *Thị* sometimes omit their middle name. *Thị* is by far the most common female middle name. Some common male middle names include *Văn, Hữu, Đức, Thành, Công, Quang*.

The given name is the primary form of address for Vietnamese. It is chosen by parents and usually has a literal meaning in the Vietnamese language. Names often represent beauty, such as bird or flower names, or attributes and characteristics that the parents want in their child, such as modesty (*Khiêm*). Typically, Vietnamese will be addressed with their given name, even in formal situations, although an honorific equivalent to "Mr.", "Mrs.", etc. will be added when necessary. This contrasts with the situation in many other cultures, where the family name is used in formal situations.

In the U.S. most Vietnamese change the order of their names to adapt to the U.S. custom of putting the family name last. Children born to Vietnamese families may be given traditional Vietnamese names but also have an American name that they go by. To ensure the correct spelling and handling of Vietnamese names it is a good idea to request a copy of the person's birth certificate.

## **APPENDIX C: REQUEST FOR BAPTISMAL SPONSOR SUBSTITUTE**

In accord with a reply of the Congregation for the Sacraments (13 Nov 1984 Prot. No. 1032/84) regarding canons 872 and 873, parents of children who are still in the formative period of Christian life (infancy to age 14) may request, for serious reason, a substitute sponsor for the actual baptismal sponsor. (This request excludes a Christian Witness.) The substitute sponsor must be qualified in accord with canon 874 §1 and be willing to undertake the responsibilities of a sponsor in helping the baptized to lead a Christian life in harmony with baptism. (Sponsor certificate must be presented.)

The parish priest may petition the Diocesan Bishop to appoint a substitute sponsor for one or both of the actual baptismal sponsors who have been impeded by death, serious illness, or radical departure from the faith by a formal act. (Simple non-practice of the faith does not qualify for permission.) Canon 873 must be observed as to the number and sex of the substitute sponsors.

If the request is approved, the Diocesan Bishop will authorize the name of the substitute sponsor to be added to the baptismal register. (The name of the original sponsor is not to be removed.)

**PETITION FOR APPOINTMENT OF A SUBSTITUTE  
BAPTISMAL SPONSOR**

The undersigned parent(s) of \_\_\_\_\_, who was  
baptized in the Church of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
*Name of Parish* *City*  
\_\_\_\_\_, of the Diocese of \_\_\_\_\_,  
*State*  
on the \_\_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, (attach baptismal certificate)

hereby request that the Most Rev. Bishop Anthony B. Taylor appoint

\_\_\_\_\_

to act as substitute for our child's baptismal sponsor and that the name of the substitute sponsor be inscribed in the Baptism Register.

The reason for the substitution is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

The undersigned sponsor substitute has affirmed the intention to accept the responsibility of a baptismal sponsor and is qualified in accord with canon 874.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent                      Signature of Parent                      Signature of Sponsor Substitute

\*\*\*\*\*

The undersigned parish priest judges that the reasons for the request are legitimate and recommends that the petition be granted.

PARISH SEAL

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Priest

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parish, City

\*\*\*\*\*

The above mentioned sponsor substitute is hereby appointed and their name is to be added to the Baptism Register as substitute. The name of the original sponsor is not to be removed.

CHANCERY SEAL

\_\_\_\_\_  
Chancellor for Canonical Affairs

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**SOLICITUD PARA NOMBRAR UN PADRINO/UNA MADRINA DE BAUTISMO SUPLENTE**

Los padres abajo firmantes del niño \_\_\_\_\_,  
 quien fue bautizado en la parroquia de \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_,  
Nombre de la parroquia ciudad  
 \_\_\_\_\_, en la diócesis de \_\_\_\_\_,  
Estado  
 el día \_\_\_\_\_ de \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, (*ajuntar el certificado de bautismo*)

solicitamos que el Reverendísimo Obispo Anthony B. Taylor nombre a

\_\_\_\_\_

para reemplazar al padrino (la madrina) de bautismo de nuestro hijo y que el nombre del padrino (la madrina) suplente esté escrito en el registro bautismal.

La razón para el reemplazo es \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

El padrino (la madrina) abajo firmante afirma la intención de aceptar la responsabilidad de ser el padrino (la madrina) de bautismo y está calificado de acuerdo con el canon 874.

Firma del Padre	Firma de la Madre	Firma del padrino/madrina suplente
*****		

El párroco abajo firmante juzga que las razones dadas son legítimas, y recomienda que se apruebe la solicitud.

SELLO PARROQUIAL

\_\_\_\_\_  
Firma del Párroco

Fecha	Parroquia, Ciudad
*****	

La persona arriba mencionada ha sido nombrada padrino (madrina) suplente y su nombre debe ser añadido al registro de bautismo como suplente. No se debe quitar el nombre del padrino (la madrina) original.

SELLO DE LA CANCELLERÍA

\_\_\_\_\_  
Canciller para Asuntos Canónicos

\_\_\_\_\_  
Fecha