

All church courts collect and use personal information in the course of their work. Some of this personal information—i.e., baptismal, marriage, and burial records—is created and must be retained for legal purposes, while other personal information is generated only to only fulfill immediate tasks, such as mailing lists of potential donors.

Regardless of the purpose or use, it is important to identify what contains personal information and how this information should be used and managed to protect people's privacy. Proper care of personal information should not be seen as a hindrance but as a commitment to respect others.

### **The United Church of Canada's Commitment to Privacy**

In 2004, The United Church of Canada recognized the importance of protecting personal information by implementing its own Privacy Standards Policy.

This policy allows for the collection, use, management, retention, protection, disclosure, and disposition of personal information held at church offices in compliance with all applicable federal and provincial legislation. This includes, but is not limited to, the federal *Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act* (PIPEDA) (2000, c.5).

For more information on applicable federal and provincial legislation, see the website of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada ([www.priv.gc.ca](http://www.priv.gc.ca)).

### **What Is Personal Information?**

Personal information includes information such as:

- home address and phone number
- age
- race, national or ethnic origin
- religion
- sexual orientation
- marital status
- mental or physical disability
- family members' names
- social status
- employee files, including evaluations, disciplinary actions, existence of a dispute, and related opinions
- income, credit, and bank records
- donation information
- loan records
- medical records

Certain records that contain, or may contain, personal information:

- baptismal, marriage, and burial records
- employee records (ministry personnel and lay employees)
- pension and benefits records
- directories and mailing lists of church members, committees, and church groups
- stewardship and donor information
- records of committees that focus on personnel and pastoral relations
- records of disputes, hearings, and commissions

Personal information does **NOT** include:

- name, job title, business address, and contact information
- information that could otherwise be found publicly, i.e., phonebook, published obituaries

### **Use of Personal Information**

Records containing personal information, whether in paper or electronic form, can be used only for the purposes for which they were created.

For example, employees of the United Church provide contact information so they can be reached in case of emergency. The contact information cannot be used to generate mailing lists for stewardship campaigns because the information was not collected for that purpose.

## Protection of Personal Information

The United Church of Canada is responsible for all personal information in its possession or custody, so follow certain safeguards to protect such information from misuse:

- Store personal information in a secure, locked location. If the information is in electronic form, make sure it is password protected.
- Only authorized individuals should have access to the information.
- Church directories and other mailing lists should be for internal use. Do not distribute these to external parties, e.g., public libraries.
- Keep personal information only for as long as it is required to meet any potential obligations or legal or government requirements.

Once the information is no longer needed, destroy it, except in cases where federal or provincial retention rules apply or where the records have archival value.

## Baptismal, Marriage, and Burial Registers

Church officials are required to provide accurate records of baptisms, marriages, and burials that they perform. These records must be kept by the session, or equivalent body, of the pastoral charge until they are transferred to the appropriate [Regional Council Archives](#). These records contain detailed personal information about the individuals involved, and thus must be stored in a closed and secure location. Only those responsible for maintaining the registers should have access to them.

When someone requires a certified copy of their baptismal or marriage record, only that person can request their information. A parent or legal guardian can request information for those under the legal age. For more information on how to obtain certified copies of your records, contact your [Regional Council Archives](#).

With the increasing interest in family history, pastoral charges may frequently receive requests from genealogists to have access to baptismal, marriage, and burial records. Such requests should be denied for records where the person is likely still living unless written permission is granted by the person(s) whose information is contained in the record.

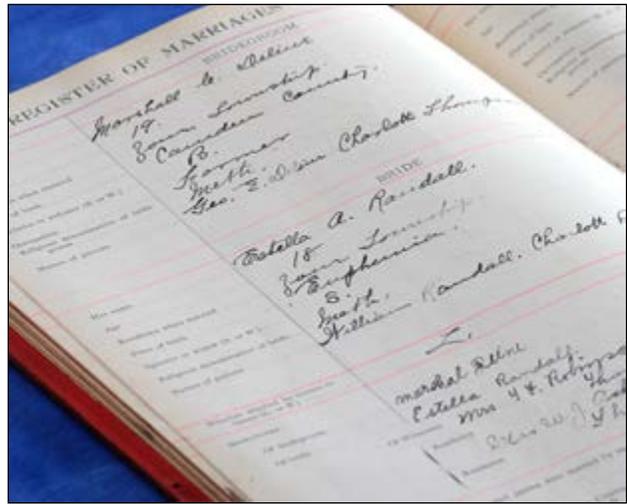


Photo copyright and credit: The United Church of Canada Archives

## Privacy and Archives

The network of United Church Archives across the country respects the protection of personal information found in archival records. Although these records are permanently preserved because of their historical value and potential research use, privacy must still be considered. For this reason, the Archives have restrictions on the use of records containing personal information.

Personnel records are restricted for 100 years from date of birth. Restrictions on baptismal, marriage, and burial records vary across Canada. For restrictions on vital statistics, contact your [Regional Council Archivist](#).

Access to certain restricted material can be granted upon approval of an archivist and subject to conditions on a case-by-case basis.

For more information on access to restricted material, please consult the [General Council Archivist](#) or your [Regional Council Archivist](#).

If you have any further questions about personal information and privacy, contact your Regional Archives:  
Search "archives network" at  
[www.unitedchurcharchives.ca](http://www.unitedchurcharchives.ca)