

Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston
Office of Archives & Records
Research & Access Policy
Revised: June 2013

CONDUCTING GENEALOGICAL RESEARCH

The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston welcomes genealogical research requests. Due to the confidential nature of sacramental records, the following policies and procedures are designed to protect the privacy of the individuals named in the records.

There is a 70 year seal placed on baptismal records (current year minus 70). Records 70 years old and less are closed to the public. No restrictions apply to records of First Communion, Confirmation, Marriage, Death, Interment or Burial. Information on adoptions is not available to the public.

The Archives has **only** the records for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. We do not have government records (such as birth certificates, marriage licenses, death certificates, etc.), records from other Dioceses, or records from other religious denominations.

The following general policy statements apply to all genealogical research requests:

1. Requests for genealogical research will only be accepted through the mail, e-mail or through the form available on our website. On-site research may only be accommodated with the permission of the Director of Archives
2. The normal response to research will be an abstract from the record(s).
3. Each request may take up to ten business days (two weeks) to answer.
4. Research and duplication fees will be charged to cover the Archives' operating costs. Please see the Fee Schedule for the complete listing of fees. United States copyright laws apply to all duplication materials.
5. Information that may invade the privacy of others will be redacted from the file unless the person mentioned provides a signed and notarized letter authorizing the release of the information.

The Diocese has the following types of genealogical records:

Sacramental Records - Sacramental records are those records pertaining to the sacrament(s) of baptism, confirmation, and marriage. Each parish records this information in a sacramental register that is maintained in the parish until its transfer to the Archives. The sacramental registers have been microfilmed for preservation and security and the microfilmed copies are maintained in the Archives.

The Archives staff will do a **limited** amount of genealogical research from the microfilmed sacramental registers. Researchers will be charged a research fee for each request (please refer to the fee schedule). When necessary, researchers will be referred to the open parish or school for information.

When requesting genealogical information, please complete a Sacramental Records Request Form (available on the website), or submit the following information in writing:

1. Whenever possible, provide the complete name(s) of the person(s) to be researched.
2. Designate specific sacramental record(s) to be searched (baptism, confirmation, or marriage).
3. Provide approximate date(s) for the person(s) to be researched.
4. Designate the ethnic group(s), German, Irish, Polish, etc., when applicable.
5. Provide the name of the town, county, or region of the state where the person(s) resided.
6. Provide the name of the church(es) to be searched.
7. Ask for no more than five (5) specific persons to be researched at a time.
8. Please do not submit a second request until you have received a reply to your first request.

Corrections to spelling, changes of dates, and name changes will only be made upon presentation of a valid, certified civil birth or marriage certificate.

Personal Sacramental Records - Individuals looking for their own sacramental records will be referred to their parish of origin or merged parish. If an individual cannot locate the parish's new location, they may contact the Director of Archives for assistance. If the parish is suppressed, and the records are in the Archives, the Archives staff will conduct the search.

Authorized Recipients of Personal Sacramental Records

1. The person named in the record (if over 18, or an emancipated minor).
2. A parent or legal guardian of the person named in the record (if the person is under age 18 or incapacitated).
3. Other parties as designated in writing by person (a) or (b) above.
4. If person (a) is deceased, their heirs may have access to the records. The Archives must be supplied with an official copy of the deceased person's death certificate and an official birth, baptismal, or marriage certificate showing that the requester is the next of kin. If the official documents are not available, notarized copies are acceptable. All documentation will be returned.
5. Roman Catholic clergy or designates for the purpose of canonical investigation.
6. Other parties as designated by court order, subpoena, summons, state or federal statute.

When requesting personal sacramental records, please submit a Sacramental Records Release Form (available on the website), or submit the following information in writing:

1. Name of parish where sacrament was performed.
2. Name of sacrament.
3. Name of recipient.
4. Approximate date and year of sacrament.
5. Requests for baptismal sacraments must include the date of birth and parent(s) name(s).
6. Name, address, daytime telephone number, and signature of person making request.
7. Photocopy of a photo ID (driver's license, state identification card, passport, etc.). If an ID is not available, the letter must be notarized.

Adoption Records - Records relating to adoptions are closed. Please contact Catholic Charities West Virginia for information on Adoption Records.

Orphanage Records - Access to these records is restricted. All orphanage records may only be released in accordance with West Virginia laws on the disclosure of confidential information.

Authorized Recipients of Orphanage Records

1. The person named in the record.
2. A parent or legal guardian of the person named in the record (if the person is under age 18 or incapacitated).
3. Other parties as designated in writing by person (a) or (b) above.
4. If person (a) is deceased, their heirs may have access to the records. The Archives must be supplied with an official copy of the deceased person's death certificate and an official birth, baptismal, or marriage certificate showing that the requester is the next of kin. If the official documents are not available, notarized copies are acceptable. All documentation will be returned.
5. Roman Catholic clergy or designates for the purpose of canonical investigation.
6. Other parties as designated by court order, subpoena, summons, state or federal statute.

School Records (Restricted Collection) - Researchers are not entitled to the complete school record. Under provisions of Diocesan policy and federal law, researchers are only allowed "Directory Information." This includes: name and address, telephone number, birthday, birthplace, major field of study, participation in school activities, weight and height of members of athletic teams, dates of attendance, awards received, previous schools attended, the student's photograph, and the parish in which the student resided. This information is taken from the student's record at the time the student attended the school. Current information is not available from the Archives under any circumstances.

Deceased Priest Files (Restricted Collection) - The Archives stores the personal files of deceased Diocesan priests. Generally, only biographical information or photographs may be released to researchers.

PLEASE NOTE: The Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston currently comprises the entire state of West Virginia. **The Diocesan boundaries were changed in 1974.** The eight counties of the eastern panhandle of West Virginia were transferred from the Diocese of Richmond to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston at that time. Likewise, seventeen and one-half counties in southwest Virginia were transferred from the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston to the Diocese of Richmond. All records regarding the parishes in these counties were transferred to their respective Dioceses. The Archives has a limited selection of microfilmed records and archival records relating to the southwest Virginia parishes up to 1974 and research in these records will be performed on a case by case basis.

The Archives has **no** records relating to annulments. The Tribunal of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston (P.O. Box 230, Wheeling, West Virginia, 26003, (304) 233-0880) holds all records of annulments. **Tribunal records are not available for genealogical investigation under any circumstances.**

RESEARCH GUIDELINES

Reading Room Regulations - Archives staff, diocesan personnel and the general public will be allowed reasonable access to the Archives collections. Historical records or artifacts will be made available by appointment only during designated business hours. Not all portions of the official records of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston are considered to be public information, and restrictions may be placed on the use of selected material. The primary reason for controlling access to the Archives is the security and preservation of the collections. All materials will be kept in the Archives and will be examined in a designated research area. **No researcher will be allowed to borrow records or artifacts for any period of time for their personal use.**

Written reading room regulations will be provided to all researchers upon arrival. Visitors and Archives staff will be required to abide by these regulations, which have been implemented to protect the records and artifacts from damage, unnecessary wear, and theft. These regulations must be read and signed by each visitor before he or she are allowed to conduct research. Regardless of the frequency of visits, a researcher must sign the guest book each time he or she comes into the Archives for research.

The Director of Archives reserves the right to restrict access to collections during a scheduled inventory or collection rearrangement.

DUPLICATION SERVICES

Federal Law and Copy / Literary Rights - The Copyright Act of 1978 (PL 94-553) provides statutory protection for all writings from the dates of their creation, whether or not they are formally copyrighted. Generally, the term of copyright is the life of the author plus fifty years. It is the responsibility of the researcher to obtain permission for the publication and commercial use of material not clearly in the public domain, as penalties for violation of this statute are severe.

1. Copies, either photocopy or photographic, of published material without the copyright holder's permission are restricted by federal law to **EXCERPTS** (not the whole) of books, articles, essays, etc., and to scholarly, non-commercial use only.
2. Copies of unpublished material, such as correspondence, all papers, and photographs from manuscripts collections, are permitted if the original owner or executor of the papers has transferred the copy/literary rights to the collection to the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston. For each collection, please check with the staff.
3. Copies of any published material from the Diocesan Archives are permitted. Copies of department or office files are prohibited without the written consent of the generating department or office, and of the Chancellor of the diocese.
4. Depositing of photocopies or photographic copies from another repository is prohibited.
5. Written permission must be obtained from the owners of the copy/literary rights and from the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston for any publication or commercial use of the copies. The permission granted by the diocese to use copies of material held in the Archives does not constitute and may not be substituted for permission from the owner of the copy/literary rights, which is the direct responsibility of the user to obtain.
6. A one-time user fee may be charged, based on a sliding scale, for the commercial use of each copy for a single, specified project only. Further use of a copy for another project or purpose requires a new application for permission and payment of additional fees.
7. If the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston holds the copy/literary right to the duplicated document or photograph, the Archives must be acknowledged and noted if either format is exhibited or published (for example, *Courtesy of the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston Archives*).
8. A printed notice or complimentary copy of the exhibition, publication, film or television media in which the item(s) will appear must be sent to the Archives.

Procedure

1. Copies of documents or photographs from all manuscript collections, Diocesan archives, rare books and graphics must be pre-approved by the Director of Archives. Please notify staff if copies are needed.

2. Copies of extremely aged and fragile material will not be permitted. The staff will not make copies from books and newspaper clippings that can be found elsewhere.
3. It is the researcher's responsibility to indicate which items are to be copied and to ensure the duplication request form accompanies the original material.
4. The amount of copying permitted is restricted by staff time and availability. Researchers are encouraged to select **no more than 20-50 pages** for copying.
5. Completion of orders is based on staff time and availability. **Orders will not be completed on a "while you wait" basis.** Exceptions may be granted for requests of five pages or less, if staff availability allows.
6. **Please do not remove original material from the folders.** The staff will provide paper strips for flagging selected items. Use one strip per item with the following information: date, subject, or number of pages to be copied. Place the strip **in front** of the item and **sideways**, so that the strip is visible when the folder is placed back in the box. Be sure to indicate to staff which boxes contain copy orders and which boxes can be re-shelved.

Duplication request forms **must be signed** before orders can be processed.