

Repair of Sacramental Registers



Diocese of Pittsburgh

Repair of Sacramental Registers

Canon Law requires Baptism, Confirmation, Marriage and Death records be maintained (Canon 535 895). In addition, the Diocese of Pittsburgh requires records of First Holy Communions to be kept.

Within these pages, parishes will identify what to do and how to deal with damaged books. Included in each section are the supplies needed and approximate cost involved. **If at any time, you do not feel that you can perform the task(s), stop.** It is better to let a trained conservator treat the problem than to make a situation worse.

Before using any vendor (except archival materials suppliers) or conservator, consult the Archives & Records Center (412) 456-3158. Vendors of archival supplies are at the end.

Older sacramental registers should be transferred to the Archives. Death records that are finished having entries being made should be transferred. Contact us for assistance. We will come to the parish to discuss which records should be transferred and pick up them. The Archives & Records Center staff will enter all notations, fill out certificates, and perform genealogical research. This allows parish staff to focus on other tasks and frees valuable office and storage space.

Any sacramental register that is in poor condition should be considered for transfer to the Archives. The responsibility of conserving the volumes is shifted from the individual parish to the Archives. If entries still are being made in a deteriorating volume, purchase a new acid-free register and start entries in the new book.

Sacramental records at the Archives are stored in a secure, temperature and humidity controlled room with a fire suppression system. The bottom line is that the Archives can contact the necessary vendor and provide the housing to maintain the records while saving the parish the time and expense involved in their upkeep. If you need assistance concerning the state of your sacramental registers or need to transfer registers, please do not hesitate to contact us.

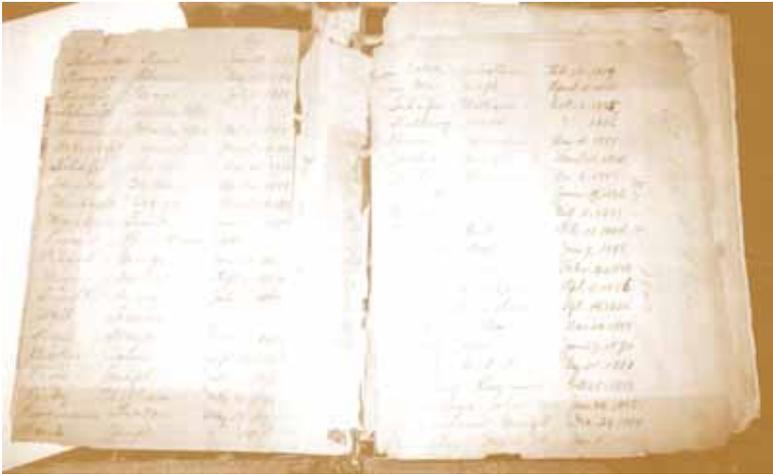
1. Tape/Tears

A. Tape. **Never use adhesive tape anywhere in or on the volumes.** Tape can discolor, become brittle over time, stick to other pages, and lift off information.

If your register has tape, do not try to remove it. Only a trained conservator can remove tape. If it flakes off and is dry and brittle, however, it may be lifted off carefully.

If the pages are sticking together slightly, they may be interleaved with polyester film. This will prevent the tape from sticking to itself or other pages.

B. Tears. Tears may be repaired only by a trained paper conservator. Never use tape of any kind.



Above: A register in very poor shape. The edges of the page are brittle with pieces broken off and a large tear on the left hand side, close to the spine. Tape, which has discolored the paper, is used to prevent additional loss of information and to hold together the torn page.

Archival Supplies Needed:

Polyester film (Melinex)—\$16.89/10 sheets (10" x 12")

2. Brittle Pages

Brittle pages are a result of acidic paper. Over time, the chemical bonds decay and the paper falls apart. Once paper is brittle, there is

no way to reverse the effects. One can tell that paper is brittle by the yellowing of the paper (starting with the edges first) and any pieces of paper that fall off when the book is handled.

In order of preference, here are measures that can be taken to preserve the registers:

A. The best way to prevent acid from destroying the paper is to deacidify it before it becomes brittle. This should be done as soon as you notice yellowing on the edges of the paper. Only a trained vendor can do this. Contact the Archives for assistance.

B. Another option is having a bindery copy the pages and rebind them. The bindery should create a special box, known as a phase box, for the original. This should be done professionally. Transfer the original to the Archives.

C. A third method to conserve the original book is to purchase a new, acid-free register and transfer the information, using acid-free pens, from the original into the new. Extreme care must be taken to ensure that all information is copied exactly as in the original. The old register should be transferred to the Archives.

3. Broken Spine/Broken Cover Boards

Broken spines and broken cover boards only can be repaired by a trained bookbinder. As soon as you notice the spine and covers loosening, they should be fixed before they fall apart. **Do not use tape to fix these problems.**

4. Loose Pages

Any page that is becoming loose must be repaired quickly by a conservator before it detaches from the book. Pages that already have become detached must be repaired by a conservator or bindery. Consult the Archives for a recommended vendor. **Do not use tape to reinsert or hold together pages.**

5. Lamination

In some cases, the pastor may have removed the pages from a book and laminated them. Lamination is very damaging to paper. Restrict



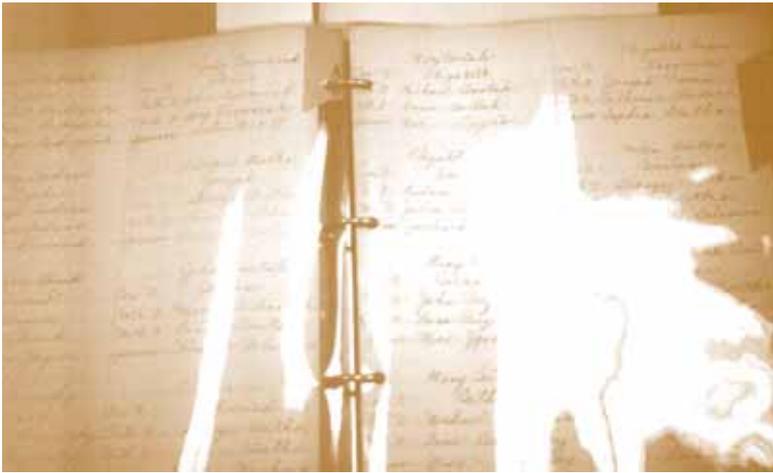
Above: A spine has been lost. The book on the right exhibits red rot on the corners and spine. These two books should be rebound by an approved bookbinder.

handling of laminated pages. A bindery should copy the pages onto acid-free paper and bind or place them in an acid-free box. Use the copies instead of the originals. Transfer the original register to the Archives.

6. Encapsulation

If the pages of a book have been encapsulated in a clear film, the pages should be removed, deacidified, and placed in acid-free file folders and boxes or placed in new archival safe polyester, polyurethane, or polyethylene film sealed with double-sided tape. The acid-free file folders and boxes protect the pages from light and dirt and provide support.

If pieces of the paper are breaking off inside the old film, a trained conservator should be consulted to assess and treat the page; contact the Archives & Records Center before calling in a conservator.



Above: An example of encapsulated pages in a binder. Not only is the film non-archival safe, holes have been driven through some of the writing. The paper is acidic as evidenced by the yellowing of the edges. The pages should be removed from the film, deacidified, and placed in acid-free folders and boxes.

Archival Supplies Needed:

Acid-free file folders—\$35.55/100

Acid-free boxes—\$6-12/box (depends on size)

Polyester film—\$55-\$120/roll

Double-sided tape—\$7.69/roll (1/4" wide)

7. Insects/rodents

These pests, such as bookworms, booklouse, silverfish, cockroaches, mice, or rats like to munch on mold and other organic matter found in ill-kept areas; some also like to eat starches in the books' adhesives and bindings.

If an active infestation of the books is discovered, treatment is necessary. Do not use chemicals near the registers. A proven method involves sealing the infested books into freezer bags and freezing them for 72 hours; a standard freezer can be used so long as the freezing takes place quickly. The books should be bagged quickly so insects do not escape. The materials also should be packed loosely in the bag or freezer, because insects might be able to survive. The books need to be allowed to thaw slowly; then, the process is repeated to ensure the insects are dead. Any dead bugs can be brushed out of the book.

If insect carcasses are discovered and no sign of life is visible, lightly brush the carcasses out of the book. Check the rest of the volume and keep an eye on the area to make sure there are no living pests. Ensure the area is clean and free of food.

Do not place mouse traps near to where the books are stored but probable points of entry, such as outside doors, basement windows, and utility entries.

8. Red Rot

Red rot is a condition in which the leather decomposes owing to high acidity in the book, high humidity, high temperature, and pollutants. It is characterized by weakening and a reddish-brown powdering of the leather. Red rot begins with cracking of leather parts that are bent or worn; the leather also takes on a pinkish color. The later stages include widening of the cracks, darkening of the leather, and a reddish-brown powdering. The leather also feels like felt. Red rot is irreversible. It can migrate to adjacent leather, too. Rebinding is the only option and must be done by a professional bindery.

9. Stains

The best way to prevent stains from happening is to keep food and liquids away from the registers. If something spills on the register or a pen leaks, the offending matter must be blotted up immediately to prevent it from spreading. Use paper towels to gently blot the liquid. Do not wipe. Interleave paper towels between the affected page and the next to keep it from migrating to additional pages. Remove the wet towels and replace with dry ones until the area is dry. Keep the page open so that it may air dry. You are only drying the liquid; you are not trying to clean the paper or remove any stain. Once it has been blotted and dry, leave it alone.

If a stain is evident after the substance dries, do not try to remove it; this will only cause more damage. Some inks are water soluble and could be wiped out. Only a trained paper conservator should attempt to remove stains. Any old stains that are discovered in the book should not be cleaned or removed by anyone other than a conservator, either. Consult the Archives for a recommended conservator.

If a stain is covering up information and you cannot read it, a paper conservator should be consulted to determine if the stain can be removed or lightened enough to read the underlying entry.

10. Worn Covers

Do not use tape to repair a cover's worn spots or corners.

Only a book conservator can repair this damage. The other option is rebinding.

11. Binders

Do not use them. Paper can become weakened and information lost by placing holes in the paper. If the pages are housed in a binder, carefully remove them. The pages should be deacidified by a conservator and placed into acid-free file folders and boxes.

12. Fasteners

Staples, paperclips, and rubber bands need to be removed. A word of caution: some registers are held together with staples. Do not remove these!

To remove staples: turn over the page so the prongs face you. With a fingernail or flat tool, such as a microspatula, gently pry up the prongs, and remove the staple from the holes. Do not use staple removers as these can slip and damage the surrounding paper or pull out chunks of paper. If rusted, work the microspatula or fingernail between the staple and the paper to release it.

To remove paperclips: place a heavier sheet or sheets of paper under the long side so adjoining pages do not become damaged. Turn the page so the short side faces you. Holding the long side (through the paper), gently bend up the short side, and remove. If rusted, work the microspatula or fingernail slowly between the paperclip and the paper to release it.

To remove crusted rubber bands: use a fingernail or small flat tool to slowly move away the rubber from the paper.

If at any time the fastener or rubber band will not separate from the paper, stop.

Archival Supplies Needed:

Microspatula—\$32.55/set of 4

13. Fire

If a fire occurs, immediately contact the Archives & Records Center (412) 456-3158.

14. Flood/Water Damage

If a flood or water damage occurs, immediately contact the Archives & Records Center (412) 456-3158.

15. Mold

If an active mold outbreak occurs, immediately contact the Office for Archives & Records Center (412) 456-3158.

Vendors

Archival Supplies (Please keep in mind that there are other suppliers of archival materials out there.)

Gaylord Brothers

P.O. Box 4901
Syracuse, NY 13221-4901
1-800-962-9580
www.gaylordmart.com

Conservation Resources

5532 Port Royal Road
Springfield, VA22151
1-800-634-6932
www.conservationresources.com

Metal Edge, Inc.

6340 Bandini Avenue
Commerce, CA 90040
1-800-862-2228
www.metaleedgeinc.com

