

EXCERPT FROM “ARCHIVES & RECORDKEEPING”
A How-to Guide for Congregations and Conferences
Committee on Archives and History
The United Church of Canada

**Detailed Guidelines for Maintaining Minute Books
for Church Archives and Records Committees**

The following expands the general information on recordkeeping outlined in *The Manual*, Section 092.

- (a) **the Secretary shall keep full and accurate minutes of the proceedings of all meetings**
In the minutes, include a short summary of the opinions, facts, and ideas to indicate that the meeting considered all sides of an issue. It is particularly important to do this when decisions are significant or controversial, or if they concern matters that are the responsibility of one court only (for example, the congregation’s governing body and its responsibility for church membership). See section (o).

In summary of discussion, avoid including names unless people specifically ask to have their names recorded.

- (b) **the minutes shall be written in ink in a legible hand, or typewritten, or printed**
Recorders are urged to have minutes typed wherever possible. The phrase “typewritten or printed” also includes other methods of reproduction such as computer printer or photocopier. When minutes are reproduced mechanically, ensure that the copy for the Archives is clear and printed on permanent paper. See section (c).

If minutes must be handwritten, recorders should ensure that their writing is legible. Use permanent ink that is not water soluble. If a ballpoint pen is used, ensure that it is one of high quality. Minutes completed in pencil are unacceptable.

Consider a paper copy of minutes to be the permanent archival record until the criteria for the long-term preservation and use of electronic formats (computer diskettes) have been established. Computer diskettes are not a stable medium for long-term preservation. There is at present no process or technology to ensure that the information on diskettes will continue to be readable over the long term.

Most minutes are now word processed on a computer. Designate the original (or one other copy) as the archival copy and ensure that it is signed by the presiding officer and secretary. See section (f).

Use permanent paper for the official signed copy of records. Permanent paper will not turn yellow and disintegrate over time, thereby enabling the permanent preservation of important records. Information on ordering permanent paper is found in Appendix B.

Use stainless steel staples or paper clips (plastic preferred) when necessary. Do not use adhesive tape of any kind because the adhesive backing deteriorates and stains the paper.

The archival set of minutes produced on computer no longer has to be formally bound by a bookbinder. Minutes may be sent to the archives in whatever form they are kept, for example, in file folders or binders; they will be transferred to archival folders and archival boxes for permanent storage.

Those who wish to keep their current minutes in accordance with the method recommended by the Committee on Archives and History will find information on where to order the necessary supplies in Appendix B.

Those who write their minutes in pre-bound minute books may continue to do so. However, do not paste photocopies or computer printouts of minutes into already bound volumes. This damages the binding, and over time, the glue stains the paper. If recorders are currently keeping a “pasted” volume of records, they should close that book immediately, even if it is not completely filled.

- (c) **if the minutes be written by hand, they shall be written in a bound book provided for that purpose. If the minutes be produced by other means, one (1) signed original set of minutes shall be bound at suitable intervals in accordance with the methods specified by the General Council Committee on Archives and History. This information may be found in *Archives & Recordkeeping: A How-to Guide for Congregations and Conferences*, which is available from the Conference Archives Committee or the Central Archives;**
- (d) **the pages shall be numbered, and the number of each page written or printed at the top of the page**

Record page numbers at the upper outside edge of the page, away from the inside margin. Number all pages consecutively to ensure that pages cannot be added or removed.

Begin a new series of consecutive numbering at appropriate intervals (for example, after one volume of minutes has been bound, or at the beginning of a new Conference year, or at the beginning of a new calendar year). Pages should be numbered 05-01, 05-02 (05 being for the year; 01 being for the page within that year). When one book is full and another one is started, note on the last page of the completed book that it is the last page of the volume and indicate the first page number in the next volume.

Appendices should be included in the consecutive numbering system. Each page of the appendix should have its own specific number. See section (m).

- (e) **every page shall be signed or initialed by the Secretary**
Sign or initial minutes at the bottom outside edge of the page away from the interior margin. Signing indicates that the secretary who has written the minutes takes responsibility for their accuracy, that all pages are included, and that pages are in proper order.
- (f) **the record of each meeting of the Court shall be signed by the Presiding Officer and the Secretary**
Signatures of the presiding officer and the minute secretary ensure responsibility for the record. Print or type the full name and title of each of the two officers directly below their

signatures. The presiding officer who signs is the person who chaired the meeting at which the minutes were read, approved, and corrected. The secretary who signs the minutes is the person who prepared those minutes.

- (g) **the time and place of each meeting shall be fully stated words, and the date of the meeting shall be indicated on the margin at the top of each page**

Put the complete date (including the year), the name of the group that is meeting, and the place of the meeting in the middle to outside of each page. Write out the time, place, and date of each meeting to ensure accuracy. To avoid confusion, indicate the month in words rather than numbers. Dating is essential when minute searches are required.

- (h) **the minutes shall state by whose or what authority the meeting is held, “at the call of the Chairperson,” “according to adjournment,” or as the case may be; and that a quorum was present**

Clearly state the authority for calling any special meetings. The phrase “regular meeting,” for example, indicates the authority under which the meeting is being held. The phrase “according to adjournment,” may also include the “regular meeting” when the information is included in the adjournment recorded at the previous meeting.

Include the quorum. This is helpful to someone who is reviewing the minutes but who may be unsure as to the group’s size.

- (i) **the opening of the meeting with prayer and closing of the meeting with prayer and/or ~~the~~ a benediction, shall be recorded in the minutes**

The meetings being recorded are meetings of the church. Such formalities are expected and should be noted accordingly.

- (j) **the name of the Presiding Officer shall be recorded and, in the Minutes of Session, Official Boards or Church Boards or Church Councils and Presbyteries, the names of the members present. The minutes of the Conference shall include the roll of the Conference**

State the name, title, and office of the presiding officer when the call to order is recorded. List the full names and titles of all persons present at the meeting. Use the same full name in the body of the minutes to eliminate confusion between names that may be similar. Use distinguishing initials or middle names if needed. Use the name by which the person is generally known. Finally, record the names of any guests and/or visitors who may be present.

- (k) **the items of business shall be briefly indicated by paragraph headings or marginal notes, for ready reference**

Headings are useful when minutes have to be searched. Headings in the text of the minutes are also useful when preparing an index. See section (t).

- (l) **care shall be taken that all numbers are distinctly written**

All numbers in the text should be written out in words, with numeric figures in brackets immediately following. This directive does not include amounts in budget statements or financial reports.

- (m) **Committee reports and other documents necessary for the understanding of the records shall be embodied in the minutes or added in an appendix. If the latter, the number of the page on which they will be found shall be given in the minutes**
When documents are added as an appendix to the minutes, number each page of the attachments consecutively. See sections (c), (d), and (e). Separate numbering of appendices is discouraged because, if an appendix becomes detached, it is difficult to determine its proper place.
- (n) **the minutes shall record all the proceedings of the Court and shall state clearly what disposal is made of all motions, Proposals, reports, etc.**
This step is essential. State clearly in words, not abbreviations, the disposal of motions.
- (o) **extraneous and irrelevant matter shall be excluded from the minutes**
It is essential that no information discovered after the end of the meeting is incorporated into the minutes. Extraneous or irrelevant matter includes such things as editorial comments from the secretary and the opinions of others not expressed at the meeting, or not relevant to matters discussed.
- (p) **all erasures, cancellings, interlineations, or other changes shall be initialled in the margin by the Secretary**
Initialling ensures that changes made in the minutes are accurate and valid. The use of correction or white-out fluid is discouraged. If used, the change must be initialled by the secretary.
- (q) **no erasures or alterations may be made after the record has been confirmed, except by resolution of the Court or by order of a higher Court, and then suitable annotations shall be made**
The secretary must make, and then initial in the original minutes, any changes authorized by the court. Changes should also be listed in the minutes of the meeting that approved them. This action provides a second copy of the changes as approved. The secretary should also cross-reference the original to the recorded source of the change.
- (r) **no unnecessary vacant space shall be left between the minutes of successive meetings. If any such vacant space be left, it shall be ruled in plain lines from the writing to the bottom of the page**
Initial but do not number vacant pages. Rule vacant pages, or vacant space on a page, diagonally from top to bottom.
- (s) **the use of initials for organizations and other abbreviations should be carefully avoided**
Give the full name of the organization when it is mentioned for the first time and then immediately follow that full name with the abbreviation of the name in brackets. After the full name with abbreviation has been used once, then the abbreviation may be used

thereafter. Full names are essential because the use of initials and abbreviations may differ from organization to organization and may change over time.

(t) **an index shall be appended to the minutes of the Conference each year**

and

(u) **the records of Pastoral Charges, Congregations and other organizations, and of the Courts, units, Departments, Sessions, Boards, Councils, and Committees of the United Church, along with correspondence and other documents of historical value, when no longer regularly needed, should be deposited in the Central Archives or the Conference archives either directly or through the Committee on Archives of the Presbytery or the Conference**

An index is useful for presbytery and pastoral charge minutes as well as for Conference minutes. The secretary of the group should prepare the index. See section (k). This important directive ensures the long-term preservation of the church's documents and records.

When transferring records to Archives, follow any guidelines that the Archives may have established about what should be permanently preserved. Any transfer of records to Archives should be fully recorded by the court or committee that created the records.