

NCDVD Policy on Maintaining Records of Candidates and Seminarians

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There is a wide variety of opinion regarding what types of records should be retained and how long they should be maintained. Oftentimes contradictory advice is given. It is important to note that records are never maintained simply for the sake of retention. They should be retained for future reference or need and should be accessible in some way by the appropriate parties. NCDVD endorses the principles espoused by Fr. Mel Blanchette of St. Mary's Seminary. For a further discussion of these issues, please see *Ethical Understandings and Legal Constraints in the Retention and Maintenance of Records* by Rev. Melvin C. Blanchette, S.S., Ph.d.

Some Legal/Ethical Considerations

- It is important to consult your diocesan legal counsel when establishing a policy to make sure that your policy conforms to larger diocesan policies as well as other statutory requirements. There is no doubt that we live in a very litigious society which in recent years has had a significant impact on the Church.
- Records can both protect or be used against a diocese or religious order. Not keeping records does not provide a defense. On the contrary it may be considered a breach of practical guidelines or even construed as an intentional desire to cover-up.
- One should never falsify records, nor should one ever withhold records that must be provided to others under the law.
- Proper control should be maintained over all records. Even though the seminary may retain certain documents, it is advised that dioceses retain their own records and do not rely on the seminary to do so.
- Records should be kept in a secure place.
- Guidelines should be established on secure and ethical record handling and record keeping with diocesan staff and secretaries. This should include some indexing so that the files can be retrieved quickly when needed.
- It is important to note that before even beginning the process of evaluation and readiness that the applicant must be apprised of his rights and be asked to sign a written consent form.
- While certain information grows stale after several years (e.g. psychological evaluations, references, etc.) and therefore is no longer reliable to use as a basis in order to make a determination whether an individual should be admitted or allowed to continue in a program, this does not mean that these records should be destroyed. One must keep in mind that in a legal setting due diligence is never assumed, but must be established and proven.
- Files should never be released to another party (e.g. another vocation director without the individual's consent).

For Applicants not admitted:

If an applicant is not admitted or chooses not to enter seminary, his file should be retained for at least ten years, perhaps even longer. This will be of assistance if he seeks admission at some point in the future whether it be with the same diocese or with another diocese or religious community. The file should include the following:

- Application form
- Release form indicating informed consent
- Psychological testing evaluation
- Correspondence to/from applicant to vocation director
- Autobiography
- Medical records
- Sacramental certificates
- Letters of recommendations
- Honorary discharge from the military
- Immigration status
- Results of criminal background check

After the retention period has elapsed, the file can be reduced to a one-page summary. Such a summary should include the reasons why he was not admitted or chose not to enter. The psychological evaluation should be retained for at least 15 years. The file should never simply be discarded without some type of summary document being put in its place.

For Candidates who are admitted:

All records should be retained in an active file during his time of formation. It should include the following:

- Application form
- Release form indicating informed consent
- Psychological testing evaluation
- Correspondence to/from seminarian to vocation director
- Autobiography
- Medical records
- Sacramental certificates
- Letters of recommendations
- Honorary discharge from the military
- Immigration status
- Results of criminal background check
- Correspondence to/from the seminary regarding the individual
- Seminary reports and evaluations
- Any subsequent psychological reports
- Academic transcripts and reports
- Any Canonical documents

For Candidates who leave:

Regardless of how long the candidate is in the seminary the record should be maintained per the criteria as set above. The following should be retained in the file:

- Application form
- Release form indicating informed consent
- Psychological testing evaluation
- Correspondence to/from seminarian to vocation director
- Autobiography
- Medical records
- Sacramental certificates
- Letters of recommendations
- Honorary discharge from the military
- Immigration status
- Results of criminal background check
- Correspondence to/from the seminary regarding the individual
- Seminary reports and evaluations.
- Any subsequent psychological reports
- Any Canonical documents
- Any documents (including summaries) related to the individual's leave

For Candidates who are Ordained:

The file should be kept in perpetuity and should become part of archives of the diocese. It is not necessary to save supportive material once it becomes part of an official document (e.g. CPE Evaluation, pastoral field placement evaluations, etc.). The entire file, once it has been gleaned of unnecessary items) should be transferred out of the care and control of the vocations office and given to the Chancellor or the Vicar for Clergy. The following should be retained in the file:

- Application form
- Release form indicating informed consent
- Psychological testing evaluation
- Correspondence to/from applicant to vocation director
- Autobiography
- Medical records
- Sacramental certificates
- Letters of recommendations
- Honorary discharge from the military
- Immigration status
- Criminal background check
- Correspondence to/from the seminary regarding the individual
- Seminary reports and evaluations.
- Any subsequent psychological reports
- Any Canonical documents

Note Regarding Electronic Files

Because of the widespread use of computers, one should be deliberative as to what types of things are placed in the permanent paper file. After an individual leaves formation (whether through withdrawal, dismissal, or ordination), all electronic files should be deleted from office and/or personal computers. Any information that needs to be retained should be printed and placed in the file before being archived.