

V. GENERAL NORMS-CERTIFICATES

A. Definitions

A certificate is an official document certifying that a particular individual has received a sacrament. It is an exact duplicate of data already entered in a sacramental register. All of the data in the register is to be duplicated on the certificate, except that which is marked confidential, and that which pertains to adoption as explained in this handbook.

B. Church Use Only

Certificates of sacraments are intended primarily for internal church use, not for civil purposes. ² Nonetheless, sometimes information may be legitimately requested for civil purposes, for example to correct an error on a birth certificate.

C. Authorized Source of Records

Only the parish or other location holding the original sacramental record may issue a certificate. ³ Only the actual register should be used in preparing certificates. A computer copy of the record may be used for a certificate, only if there is assurance that the computer copy corresponds identically to the original register. ⁴ In each case, the original register must be consulted to assure that the computer copy is accurate.

D. Authorized Requests

Any member of the Christian faithful has a right to obtain a certificate of a sacrament he or she has received and which was recorded in a sacramental register. But only that person, the parents of a minor, someone with legal guardianship of another or a *bona fide* pastoral minister at another Catholic parish have this right. When the parents of a child are separated or divorced, both parents, regardless of legal custody, are presumed to have the right to a certificate.

² Since certain data are entered in the sacramental registers based purely on the word of someone else (e.g., the date of birth of a person being baptized), the certificate is simply repeating that data but not certifying it as true.

³ When a parish closes or merges, formal arrangements are made for the transfer and retention of its sacramental registers to the parish closest to the closed parish or to the parish it has become a part of either through a merger or extinctive union (amalgamation the Contact the Chancery for other former *institutions* which maintained sacramental register.

⁴ If a certificate is issued from the microfilm copy of the sacramental record in the Diocesan Archives, for example, when the original record cannot be found, the following notation will be made on the certificate: "from the microfilmed copy of the register, accurate to the date of filming" with an indication of the filming date.

E. Procedure for Requests

Requests for certificates should be submitted in writing, although telephone requests from a Catholic parish or agency are acceptable. The Chancery has prepared an authorization form that parishes may use for written requests. (Found at www.dioceseofmarquette.org/forms under Chancellor's office) The written requests and a log of telephone requests should be kept on file for one year. No information from sacramental registers should be provided by telephone or other electronic means except to another Catholic parish or other Catholic agency. Even then, care for the privacy of persons is to be exercised.

F. Format

Certificates should have an official appearance and should be issued in a consistent format. Parishes may obtain blank certificates from commercial vendors, have them printed locally, or generate their own templates for use with a computer. All certificates must bear the name and address of the parish.

G. Authentication

Certificates must be typed, printed by computer or hand-printed in ink. They are to be signed by the pastor or his delegate and impressed with the parish seal. Photostatic and facsimile copies of certificates are not considered authentic documents.

H. Required Data

Certificates are to include all data contained in the sacramental register, except that which is marked confidential, and that which pertains to adoption as explained in this handbook. Data in the "Notations" column is to be included. If there are no data in the "Notations" column, the words "No Notations" should be printed on the certificates. The annotations of confirmation, marriage, holy orders, perpetual religious profession and change of rite are always to be reproduced on a baptismal certificate (cf. canon 535, §2).

I. Missing Record

Sometimes when a certificate is requested, the record in question cannot be found. If there is any possibility that the sacrament may have been conferred in some other parish, a sincere effort should be made to check the sacramental records of that other parish or parishes. The Chancellor's office may be able to assist with such a search. If a sacrament was never recorded, contact the Chancellor's office for assistance in establishing a sacramental record.