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## What to Keep and What to Toss in Local Church Records based on a presentation by Karen Staulters

*“What to Keep and what to Toss”* in local church records was the topic of Karen Stalter’s program presentation at the September 30, 2017 meeting of the Upper New York United Methodist Historical Society at the UNY conference center in Liverpool. Ms. Staulters is the former archivist of Troy Annual Conference and Upper New York Conference.

**Records have a retention period depending on type.** After that retention period ends (7 years for some records), the records – depending on what they are and church and locality rules – should either be *archived* or *shredded* (such as cashed checks). Historical records will include local church history records and vital records (membership records, baptisms, marriages, etc.). For closed church records, the District Superintendent is responsible for turning them over to the conference archives. The Local Church Records Schedule is available from UMC’s General Commission on Archives and History and is part of GCAH’s Managing Records of the Local Church. There are also guidelines at [gcah.org](http://gcah.org) for managing electronic records and a link to Cokesbury to buy *Guidelines for the Church Historian: Remembering the Past and Inspiring the Future*.

GCAH also offers online archival leaflets on photograph preservation basics, encapsulation, oral history, and a homemade humidifier. See box for GCAH links to local church records resources. GCAH’s United Methodist Archives and History Center is located at Drew University in Madison, New Jersey.

A quote from GCAH: *“In order for our future to have a past we must be concerned for the records of today. The development of a records management policy is the first step in preserving our past by deciding what needs to be kept today. A concern for the historical, the legal and the fiscal needs of our church motivates us to faithfully preserve our important records.”*

### Resources on Local Church Records

See [www.gcah.org/resources/managing-records-of-the-annual-conference-and-local-church](http://www.gcah.org/resources/managing-records-of-the-annual-conference-and-local-church).

**Managing Records of the Local Church** is available there in pdf format and in Word version; as is a pdf version of **Guidelines for Managing Digital Records**.

**Guidelines for Retaining the Records of Closed United Methodist Churches 2017 Edition** is available at [s3.amazonaws.com/gcah.org/Resources/Guidelines\\_Publications/Closed-Local-Church-Records-Guidelines-2017](https://s3.amazonaws.com/gcah.org/Resources/Guidelines_Publications/Closed-Local-Church-Records-Guidelines-2017).

See [www.gcah.org/resources/basic-archives](http://www.gcah.org/resources/basic-archives) for links to **Guidelines for the Church Historian** and the archival leaflets mentioned.

See [www.gcah.org/resources/how-to-write-a-local-church-history](http://www.gcah.org/resources/how-to-write-a-local-church-history) for the 2009 revised online version of Dr. Frederick E. Maser’s 1996 booklet.

See [www.gcah.org/resources/celebrating-history](http://www.gcah.org/resources/celebrating-history) for **A Traveler’s Guide to Heritage Landmarks, Celebrating our United Methodist Heritage, and Women’s History in the Local Church**.