



Sacramental Records and Genealogy Research Guide

Description of Records

Sacramental records for the Archdiocese of San Francisco date back to the early California mission-period, but information in church and parish sacramental registers typically begin dating from around the 1850s. However, the loss and destruction caused by the San Francisco earthquake and fire in 1906 left existing gaps in the records dating prior to that year.

When the Archdiocese of San Francisco was originally established in 1853, it included 13 present-day counties in Northern California. In 1962, three dioceses were formed out of the archdiocese: Stockton, Oakland, and Santa Rosa; and in 1981, the diocese of San Jose was formed. When these splits occurred, the sacramental registers remained with the parishes for those dioceses. A map of present-day Catholic dioceses in California can be found [here](#).

Description of Information Recorded

Early sacramental records were written in several languages including Latin, Spanish, Italian, German, and English. The registers typically recorded the following information about each sacrament.

Important note: Sacramental registers have varying degrees of completeness.

Marriage and Baptism

- Civic and baptismal names
- Maiden name of bride
- Name of pastor issuing the sacrament
- Names of parents
- Name(s) of sponsors
- Date of sacrament
- Name(s) of church(es) where the married couple were baptized

First Communion and Confirmation

These registers typically only consist of the date of First Communion or Confirmation with a list of the children who were Confirmed or celebrated their First Communion. Sometimes, baptism and birth information would also be recorded.

Death Register

- Name of the deceased
- Date of death
- Cause of death
- Date of burial
- Age
- Place of birth
- Residence
- Cemetery where deceased is buried

Additional information in the Death Register might include next of kin, like a surviving spouse or child; and what kind of ceremonies were provided.

Access Terms

Original sacramental registers remain with the parish, and no digital surrogates exist for researcher access at this time. Churches located in the Archdiocese of San Francisco do not permit public access to the sacramental registers. Please contact the church directly for assistance.

How to Conduct Your Research

In order to begin your search for a baptism or marriage sacramental record, you must know the name of the church where the sacrament occurred.

If you have the name(s) of possible churches, please contact them directly with your request.

Parish contact information can be found in the [Archdiocese of San Francisco's Official Directory](#). If a church is not listed in the Archdiocese of San Francisco parish directory, it usually means the church eventually became part of a different diocese.

If the name of a church is unknown, then additional research is needed.

Historically, Catholics received their holy sacraments at churches located within their residence's parish boundaries. It is therefore recommended to first identify the residence location(s) of your ancestor around the time the sacrament took place and the church(es) within that particular neighborhood's vicinity. Resources to conduct this type of research include census records and city directories.

Frequently Asked Questions

“What if the church has closed?”

For information on where the sacramental records of closed parishes were transferred to, refer to the [Archdiocese of San Francisco’s Official Archdiocesan Directory](#).

“What if the church was at one time located in the San Francisco Archdiocese but is now in a different diocese?”

Contact that church or parish directly. *Please note:* Individual dioceses may have their own procedures and practices regarding access to sacramental records for historical and genealogy research purposes.

“What if the marriage or baptism took place on a United States military base?”

Contact the [Office of Sacramental Records of the Archdiocese for the Military Services, USA](#).

“What if the baptism took place at a hospital?”

This information was typically recorded in a parish sacramental registry. Refer to census and city directories to locate the hospital where the birth took place and the church(es) within its vicinity.

“How do I research sacramental records for indigenous people?”

For historical research on indigenous peoples and early settlers of Alta California who received holy sacraments in the missions, please refer to the Huntington Library’s [Early California Peoples Project](#) online database and resource. The ECPP provides public access to digitized California mission registers from 1769-1850.

“Does the Archives have student or adoption records?”

Student Records

The Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco does not have student records. If the school is still in operation, contact them directly. If the parish school was operated by the Archdiocese of San Francisco and has since closed, please contact the Archdiocese of San Francisco’s [Department of Catholic Schools](#) for the status of these records. If a closed school was founded by a religious congregation and administered independently throughout its existence, then the records may still be held in their custody.

Orphanage and Adoption Records

The Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco does not have orphan records for institutions and various charitable organizations that operated in the Archdiocese of San Francisco. One of the earliest Catholic-operated orphanages in San Francisco was the Roman Catholic Orphan Asylum established by the Daughters of Charity in 1852. To make a genealogy inquiry about these records, contact the Epiphany Center in San Francisco. For Catholic Social Services Agency adoption records, contact the Californian State Adoptive Services Unit.

“Does the Archives have records on individuals who were under the care of charitable and social welfare organizations operated by Catholic Charities?”

The Archives of the Archdiocese of San Francisco does not hold records on individuals who have received services from Catholic Charities.

“Does the Archives have files on individual parishioners?”

The Archives has collections that may contain references made to parishioners by name, i.e. newspaper articles, but there are no “Parishioner Files”, specifically.

Additional Information and Resources

[Holy Cross Catholic Cemetery](#)

Holy Cross Cemetery in the Archdiocese of San Francisco was established in Colma, California in 1887. Genealogy research services are available for a fee.

The Monitor newspaper

The Monitor newspaper was the official publication of the Archdiocese of San Francisco from 1854 to 1984. Select issues from 1871 to 1965 have been digitized and made available online through the [Catholic News Archive](#). In addition, broken series are available for the years 1861-1888 on the [Internet Archive](#).

SF Genealogy created a [Google map](#) of Roman Catholic Churches located in San Francisco in 1893.

[The California Digital Newspaper Collection](#)

Digitized newspapers published in California dating back to 1846.

[San Francisco City Directories](#)

Digitized city directories beginning in 1850 are available on the Internet Archive from the San Francisco Public Library.