

ZKR guidelines on anonymising church court rulings

The publication of ecclesiastical (marriage) court rulings requires a responsible balance to be struck between the legitimate public interest in transparency of ecclesiastical jurisprudence, the academic interest in the development of case law, and the constitutionally protected right of the parties involved to informational self-determination. The aim is to promote the development of judicial practice through comprehensible and accessible decisions and to strengthen trust in ecclesiastical courts without jeopardising the protection of personal and sensitive data.

The publication of ecclesiastical court decisions in the online open access Journal of Canon Law (ZKR) involves the processing of personal data within the meaning of data protection law. Therefore, all decisions containing personal data are anonymised by us in accordance with the guidelines set out in this guide.

The European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), the Federal Data Protection Act (BDSG) and the provisions of the Church Data Protection Regulation (KDG) established by the German Bishops' Conference must therefore be observed.

This guideline is based on the judicial administration regulation of the state of North Rhine-Westphalia (transmission of copies of decisions to third parties and publication in databases RV d. JM of 10 May 2021 (1552 - I. 12); last accessed on 15 October 2025).

I.

Anonymisation should **not** be carried out in the following cases:

- a) the naming of states, (federal) states;
- b) the naming of particular churches such as (arch)dioceses, personal ordinariates, prelatures;
- c) the mention of the officialates and the place of jurisdiction (name and address);
- d) literary references (e.g. to the Münster Commentary or RRDec);
- e) file numbers of court decisions;
- f) the ages of the parties to the proceedings;
- g) the name of the panel of judges, in particular the examining judge (Ponens), according to which the judgement can be cited (e.g.: Coram Stankiewicz v. 23.07.1982 RRDec 74 (1982)). **At the request of the respective officialate or judge, we will anonymise the information in accordance with II. a).**

II.

Anonymisation **must** be carried out:

- a) For all natural persons (including all components of the name such as noble titles and academic titles). Anonymisation

is carried out by using a capital letter. Where possible, a random selection should be made. However, it is important that the same person is referred to consistently in the same decision. Otherwise, the judgement will no longer be comprehensible. The mention of the judicial function (prosecutor, defence counsel, witness) should **not** be anonymised, as it is essential for understanding the judgement.

- b) The name of the plaintiff shall be replaced by AA.; the name of the non-plaintiff or person absent from the proceedings shall be replaced by NN.
- c) Occupational details shall be indicated by ellipsis (...).
- d) The name of the church community/parish shall be replaced by the word "Parochia".
- e) Addresses shall be replaced by a letter, names of streets, squares, paths, alleys, etc. shall be replaced by a letter, whereby the component "-straße" shall be retained and the components "-platz", "-weg", "-gasse", etc. shall be replaced by "-straße". If such a component is missing entirely, "-straße" must be added.
- f) Dates are anonymised by replacing all numbers with the digit "0". The years in the couple's relationship history should **not** be anonymised if they are **relevant** to the proceedings (e.g. when they met, moved in together, had children, civil and church weddings). The dates of the proceedings (filing of the claim, closing of the file, judgement) are **not** to be anonymised.
- g) Telephone numbers and email addresses should be replaced with "telephone number01" and "email01".