

“If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people’s things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?”

- Luke 16: 10-12
(New Living Translation)

About Your Foundation

The Christian Church Foundation is a general ministry of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) focused on helping Disciples make legacy gifts to their favorite church related ministries. The Foundation also manages permanent funds on behalf of the whole church, and invites ministries affiliated with the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to invest long-term permanent and endowment funds through the Foundation’s Joint Investment Trust program. Planned giving services and consultations on establishing sound and prudent permanent fund policies are provided at no cost.

Foundation representatives are located throughout the country to provide services to donors, congregations and other Disciples ministries.

To learn more, call us at (800) 668-8016 or visit www.disciples.org/ccf.

*The Christian
Church Foundation
helps Disciples
make a
difference forever
and discover the joy
of serving Christ
through sharing
their resources.*



Helping Disciples Make a Difference

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A Guide to

Managing Estate Gifts

A Resource for Congregations



Helping Disciples Make a Difference

A Special Blessing

Gifts from donors' estates are a special blessing. These gifts, received from the saints of our congregation, are often their final testimony that the church is called to stretch and serve many future generations. What a great gift this testimony can be to all of us!

There are many ways that we honor testamentary gifts. Annual celebrations, perhaps in conjunction with All Saints' Sunday, recognition societies and other forms of printed acknowledgements, help to lift up the heart-felt planned gifts that benefit our church. In all of the work that we do, however, one paramount consideration deserves special focus: **We must make it a priority to understand and to honor any donor restrictions on gifts made to the church.** This is both a legal and a moral obligation. Many gifts restrict the use of funds for a specified purpose or restrict the congregation to only use the "income" generated from the gift and not to spend any portion of the original gift. Congregations with robust endowment fund policies may fail to understand that a donor's instruction, when it exists, always supersedes congregational policy. The legal responsibility to follow a donor's instructions typically doesn't end without permission from the courts — even if the church needs funds to operate, "goes out of business," or consolidates with another congregation. The following general guidelines may help your congregation to better understand your responsibilities for receiving and administering testamentary gifts.

The Start of the Process

Stewardship of testamentary gifts typically begins when a church receives a letter from an attorney, executor or trustee indicating that a donor has left a gift to the church. If the exact

language of the donor's bequest is not provided to the church in the initial correspondence, the church should request a copy of the will or the portion of the trust document providing for the bequest. Why can't you assume the executor will provide you with the needed information on any restrictions? The executor for many estates is a family member who may never have served in this role before. The important task, from the executor's perspective, may be simply to transfer funds timely to the intended beneficiaries. The executor may focus on the fact that the gift is to your congregation, but fail to fully communicate that it is for Disciples Women, or for youth ministries, or that it says that the income may be used however the church chooses. (That latter "restriction" has historically meant that you can't spend any part of the original gift. In any case, it means this gift should be accounted for separately from the church's general endowment funds.)

Obtain the Actual Wording

Obtaining original bequest or gift wording years after the gift is received is more difficult. To request a copy of a will, the church must know the county and state of the decedent's death and the approximate date of death. A call to the county clerk or the county probate clerk inquiring about how to obtain a copy of the will should provide the answers. There is usually a small fee charged for copying and mailing the document. Trust documents are not a part of the public record, so obtaining gift information from a trust typically requires contact with the original trustee or family member.

How Your Foundation Can Help

The Christian Church Foundation is available to advise a church on how to interpret restrictions on estate gifts. (There's no cost or future obligation to invest that gift with the Foundation to obtain this assistance.) The Foundation will also maintain records (copies of the will, trust, or other gift documents) for restricted gifts that are invested in segregated investment or gift accounts at the Foundation. Attending to gift details is a part of the Foundation's daily ministry. Maintaining easily accessible bequest records in perpetuity is one of the core functions of the Foundation's Treasury Services. The Foundation has established excellent practices to allow it to maintain the needed records for more than 1,000 endowments entrusted to the Foundation. The same staff and the same resources are available to help congregations maintain their gift records in perpetuity, so long as those gifts are invested in separately identified Foundation investment accounts.

The Foundation can also help a congregation put safeguards in place to insure that use of the gift is in accord with the donor's instructions. For example, if a donor's will provides that the principal (original gift amount) be maintained with income used for youth programs, the Foundation will invest the gift and distribute only income to the church — with a reminder on each check that the funds are to be used for youth programs.

While estate gifts are certainly a blessing, churches need to inform themselves on the related legal responsibilities. Christian Church Foundation representatives offer no cost consultations to help your congregation fulfill both the legal and moral responsibility to faithfully follow a donor's wishes in perpetuity.