

Will You Be Prepared?

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Have you ever heard this phrase, “Remember the Church in your will.” Churches encourage their parishioners to make provisions in their estates, but very little detail is given about the process. Furthermore, you’ve probably asked yourself, “Does anybody really do this?” The answer is yes, and I’ve seen how small bequests and large bequests make a difference.

It is my intention to begin talking about wills and estate planning so that more parishioners will consider St. John Church and/or School in their preparations. You should know that I am not an attorney or a tax advisor. I simply want to provide some educational resources to help get parishioners thinking.

Quick facts:

- It is estimated that seven out of every ten Americans have an outdated will or die without a will.
- Many people especially young individuals feel that their estate is too small to make a difference thereby viewing a will as an unnecessary expense.
- The bequest is the most frequently used method of making your wishes known. A bequest may take on a number of forms including: bequest of cash, bequest of percentage of the estate, contingent bequest, or specific assets.
- The single biggest reason most Americans do not have a will is that they are “too busy.”

Over the next couple of weeks, I will touch on stereotypes associated with wills, possible wording you can include in your will to ensure a bequest is directed to St. John Church and/or School, and hopefully inspire those of you who have already included St. John in your estate plans to be enlisted in our parish Legacy Society.



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Estate Planning and Wills

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Last week, I touched briefly on the topic of estate planning and wills. I hope by talking about the spiritual process involved in estate planning that more fellow parishioners will think about their plans and specifically what role St. John Church plays.

I once read, “a will is probably one of the most important documents you will ever sign.” I reflected on that statement for a long time. I had this ongoing conversation in my head about the importance of the “legal side” of the document, but it is so much more. Everything changed when I thought about the spirituality involved. I think it is the journey that makes a will so important. By the time a will is completed, it feels like a personal statement of who you are and your values.

When we think of who we are and our values, the church plays a major role. The church is where we worship together, receive the sacraments, find fellowship, and share our time and talents. It is a place where great joy is received and sorrow is shared. So, it only seems natural to include the church in your estate plans as part of your final act.

Many parishioners have already included the church in their estate plans, reaffirming their belief in the mission of St. John Church. Sample language you can discuss with your attorney includes:

- I give (devise) and bequest unto St. John the Evangelist of Lawrence, KS, a non-profit corporation, the sum of \$_____. (You can also use “the following property,” or “the residue of my estate.”)

So, I like to think of a will as an opportunity for you to make a final act of Christian stewardship. As your last act, a gift to the church will serve as a final testimony of your faith journey in this life and in your life at St. John. Consider expressing gratitude for life’s many blessings by remembering the church in your will.



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A common misconception is that only rich people include the church in their will. After all, it seems like only multi-million dollar estates make the headlines these days. In reality, most estate gifts to our church have come from “regular” people.

One way to leave money to the church is through a bequest in your will. A short and very generic definition of a bequest is specific language in your will that states who receives what upon your death. If you want to leave a gift to St. John Church, talk with your attorney about making provisions in your will. Your attorney will ask for the legal name and address of St. John. This is when parishioners should contact me. I can provide all these details to you and/or I'd be happy to work directly with your attorney. Sample bequest language reads like this.

“I give (devise) and bequest unto St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church of Lawrence, KS, a non-profit corporation, _____ (*fill in the blank*) .”

There are several kinds of bequests. The most popular is completing the sentence with a fixed dollar amount, a percentage, or listing assets.



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Some reasons why people fail to make a Will

- “Creating a Will is too expensive.” – think of a Will as an investment into your future and the future of your loved ones. A few hundred dollars (or more when needed) pales in comparison to not having a Will.
- “I’m not interested right now. Besides, I am still young.” – as we all know life is very unpredictable. As soon as you turn 18, you are entitled to make a Will. If you are married and/or have children, then you definitely should have a Will.
- “My family will inherit my money anyway.” – in the absence of a Will, the state will create one for you. The judge will appoint an executor, who assumes full authority over your estate (a bond might have to be posted), the court will also name legal guardian(s) for any of your minors, and a formula will determine how your assets are distributed. Without a Will, there could be a long delay before your heirs actually receive your money. A large part may actually go to the Government in Inheritance Tax or someone may inherit a portion of your estate that you would have excluded had you made a Will.
- “My family knows my wishes.” – many families go through a lot of stress and disagreements when a person dies intestate. So ask yourself: Does my family really know my wishes? Will they all agree? Who will take the responsibility of dividing my possessions? Having a professionally written Will with an attorney ensures your personal wishes are known and legally documented.
- “I don’t want to think about it.” - do you think your loved ones want to think about it especially during a time when they are grieving? Without written instructions, your family could face legal obstacles, expenses, and forced to make difficult decisions on your behalf while grieving the loss of a loved one.

More reasons next week,



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Some reasons why people fail to make a Will

- “I’m too busy.” - life tends to get in the way but the absence of a Will can have a harsh impact on your estate. Do it today and enjoy doing something fun tomorrow.
- “I wrote my will 10 years ago and don’t need to change it.” – perhaps you don’t need to change your Will. If you have married, had children, or divorced since writing your Will, you might want to consider updating it.
- “I do not have any money to leave.” – wills are not just about bequeathing money. A Will can ensure that personal or sentimental items reach the right person. A Will can enable you to name legal guardian(s) for your children. A Will can also communicate how your own funeral is to be carried out. I think most of us would underestimate how much we have both in terms of sentimental and financial value.
- “I don’t want to talk about what will happen when I die.” – it is challenging to think about such circumstances. We can’t control the end result yet we can assume some sense of responsibility that could possibly assist our loved ones down the road. Think about preparing a Will even if you simply plant the first seeds in your mind.
- “I’ve already done my Will using a “Do-It-Yourself” kit.” - there are a lot of kits out there promising to help with a valid Will. Be cautious. Some “Do-It-Yourself” kits are not valid or clear enough. For a few hundred dollars (or more when needed), you can draft a Will with an attorney. It is very easy to do a Will wrong and costly to rectify. There are certain regulations that dictate how a will should be prepared and who is entitled to serve as witnesses. An attorney will sit down with you and help explain a summary of the contents of a Will and can insure your objectives are met.



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