

Planning Your Estate: The Best Gift You Can Give Your Family

By Elizabeth Christian

Texans who die without a will can leave chaos in their wake—problems that could have been avoided if they had made good plans for their estates.

But when many people hear the word “estate,” they think, “Well, that rules me out. I don’t have an estate—I just have a house and some cars and a little retirement fund.” But forget mansions and big lawns; under Texas law, what you own, no matter how modest, *is* an estate.

The Covenant Presbyterian Foundation, whose mission is to provide long-term sustainability for Covenant Presbyterian Church, is embarking on a program to educate our members about being good stewards of their finances. Our hope is that you will see something in this very brief article that will lead you to seek expert advice if you feel you need it.

How do you find a professional advisor? The best way to start is by asking other Covenant members which attorneys, financial advisors or accountants they use and finding out if they would recommend them. Other sources, including the State Bar of Texas and the Austin Bar Association, can point you in a good direction.

Here are just some of the issues you may wish to consider:

- **Having—or refreshing—your will:** A will, with careful thought given to trusts that may be appropriate for you and your heirs, guarantees that your wishes will be carried out after your death. It’s important to review your will every three to five years or when major life events occur, including retirement. A will is also a convenient vehicle for leaving bequests to organizations you wish to support, including the Covenant Foundation.
- **Powers of attorney:** In the event you become ill or are incapacitated, powers of attorney guarantee that someone you trust is allowed to act on your behalf for financial or health decisions.

- **Social Security:** The earliest you can receive Social Security benefits in most cases is age 62, but you can also opt to defer the onset of the benefits. Deciding when to start collecting Social Security not only affects you but your family as well.
- **Property titles:** Do you share property with a business partner or another family member? Is it titled as Joint Tenancy or Tenancy in Common? One type of tenancy leaves your property to your family, the other transfers the property to the co-owner. Ensuring you've handled property ownership correctly can save your family thousands of dollars later and can make sure your assets pass as you intended.
- **Transferring your assets:** Sometimes people want to transfer their property or other assets to adult children, and this can make a great deal of sense if it is carefully thought through. But many people don't realize that liability may also be transferred. Also, transfers to minor beneficiaries must be carefully planned.

In the upcoming months, we'll look at each of these issues and more. We're eager to hear from you and welcome suggestions on future articles.

For more information, please visit covenant.org/foundation/ or contact Duane Dube or any Trustee; Elizabeth Christian, Everard Davenport, Dianne Erlewine, Larry Faulkner, JoAnne McIntosh, Megan Poore and Tana Taylor

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One generation will commend your works to another... Psalm 145:4