



What the BCP Says About Wills

June is the month in which one counsel in the Book of Common Prayer is more observed than in other months. Not a counsel to marry! Rather, a counsel to have a will.

There is a counsel in the Book of Common Prayer to have a will? Yes, that is right. Page 445 speaks of “the duty...of all persons to make wills.”

“The Minister of the Congregation” is here directed “to instruct the people, from time to time about the duty of Christian parents to make prudent provision for the well-being of their families.” And also: “of the duty of all persons to make wills, while they are in health, arranging for the disposal of their temporal goods.”

There is one further counsel here. This is, that persons making wills or trusts or other instruments of estate planning are not to neglect, if they are able, “to leave bequests for religious and charitable uses.”

Having a will or other estate plan is so important a part of Christian faith and stewardship that it is explicitly addressed in our book of worship. For an adult Christian, having a valid will and estate plan is essential.

Unfortunately 50% of Americans die without a valid will and allow the state courts to distribute their assets however the state thinks best. This abdicates an important area of choice. We can choose to whom we wish to pass the “temporal goods” with which God has blessed us.

In choosing our heirs, we naturally think first of our families. This is as it should be. But we need not stop here. There is also our spiritual family, the Church. There are also other charitable organizations carrying on important work in the world. Our “Last Will and Testament” can actually be a “testament”—an expression of our personal faith and our values. This is an important aspect of our Christian stewardship.

Why do you suppose that more people seem to write wills in June than in other months? Attorneys tell me that it is because people who are planning travel during the summer perceive extra risk in international travel and take steps to have their affairs in order.

This is a good time to make your will into a testament of your faith and values. For further information or attorney referrals, contact your priest or the gift planning office of the diocese. And the next time you have the Book of Common Prayer in your hands, look up page 445. It’s a helpful reminder for all of us.

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