

A Final Statement of Your Values and Faith

Think of your will or your estate plan as your final statement to the world of your value system. Your will or trust arranges for “the distribution of your temporal goods” (Book of Common Prayer, p. 445). In doing so, you indicate what and who are important to you.

As we go through life, it is not uncommon for our understanding of faith and sense of values to grow and shift. Our will should bear testimony to our most mature commitments. For example, a middle-aged father recently told me, “Betty and I always thought that we would leave everything to the children. But now we are re-thinking this.” He went on:

After all, our children are grown up and doing very well. Of course we want to leave them something as a sign of our deepest affection. But there are other things that are important to us: the church, and some other people who have far less. Our gifts here could make a real difference.

I encouraged these parents to discuss their thoughts with their adult children. When they did so, their oldest child replied, “Mom and Dad, part of your legacy to us has been your care and concern for others beyond our immediate family, including the church. This is a wonderful way to show it. I think that it is terrific!”

When grieving family members gather in the attorney’s office for the ritual reading of your will, what will they hear? Is your will an expression of your loves and life-commitments? Are these loves and life-commitments bigger than your immediate family? Does your will or trust give expression to your faith in God?

Some provided their attorney with a preface to their will or trust that explicitly sets forth a profession of their faith. For example:

I, ____, of Livermore, California, do hereby make and publish this my Last Will and Testament.

I believe in the Lord, Jesus Christ. I am secure in God’s love for me and am confident of everlasting life procured for me through the life, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. I leave those who survive me the comfort of knowing that I have died in this faith and am now with my Lord in eternal glory.

As a final act of faith and thanksgiving for all the blessings of my life, I direct that a tithe (10%) of my estate be divided equally among my parish and the following ministries....

Think for a moment what a comfort this statement of faith could be to your loved ones.

Your will, Deacon Charles Gearing has pointed out, is “arguably the most important document you will ever sign....Why not make sure that your “Last Will and Testament” is both? Let it be an expression of your *will* and a *testament* to your faith.”

Having an up-to-date valid will is more than a Christian duty. It is a wonderful opportunity to express our faith and gratitude and—one last time—to make a positive difference.

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