

PLANNED GIVING TOOLKIT FOR EPISCOPAL CHURCHES

A practical guide for rectors, vestries, stewardship leaders, planned giving committees, and parish administrators



Episcopal Foundation of Dallas

Strengthening faith communities through wise investments and purposeful giving

The Episcopal Foundation of Dallas exists to strengthen and support faith communities by partnering wise investments with purposeful giving. Its resources for Episcopal churches, schools, and missions include planned giving education and marketing materials, support for creating and managing endowments, policy templates, investment management, donor-advised funds, and related stewardship resources.

Table of Contents

How to Use This Toolkit	3
Important Notice	3
1. Understanding Planned Giving	4
1.0 Why planned giving matters to a church	4
1.1 Planned giving is different from annual stewardship.....	4
1.2 Is Your Church Ready?	5
Readiness checklist.....	5
1.3. Building the Leadership Structure.....	5
1.4. Creating or Strengthening an Endowment.....	6
1.5. Policies Every Church Should Consider	6
2.0 Ways Parishioners Can Make Planned Gifts	7
2.1. Wills and Estate Planning Education	8
2.2. Inviting a Gift to the Church.....	10
2.3. Creating a Legacy Society	11
2.4. Talking About Planned Giving	11
2.5. A Year-Round Communications Plan.....	12
2.6. Educational Programs for Parishioners	13
Program 1: Wills and Estate Planning 101	13
Program 2: Planned Giving Sunday.....	13
Program 3: Monday Minute.....	13
Program 4: Family Legacy Conversation	13
3.0 Receiving and Acknowledging Planned Gifts	14
3.1. Investing and Managing Legacy Gifts	14
3.2. Building a Culture of Legacy	15
3.3. Ready-to-Use Templates	15
A. Bulletin announcement.....	15

B. Newsletter article	15
C. Legacy Society invitation.....	16
D. Nonbinding legacy intention form.....	16
E. Thank-you letter for a documented intention.....	18
F. Sample rector announcement.....	18
G. Sample website copy	18
H. Sample gift acceptance policy framework.....	19
I. Sample endowment policy framework.....	19
3.4. 90-Day Launch Plan	21
4.0 Episcopal Foundation of Dallas Resources.....	21
4.1 How EFD can help a parish	21
4.2 EFD Handouts and worksheets	22

How to Use This Toolkit

Planned giving is one of the most meaningful ways a parish can invite people to connect their faith, values, and lifetime stewardship with the future ministry of the Church. This toolkit is designed to help Episcopal congregations build a planned giving ministry that is pastoral, practical, transparent, and sustainable.

It is intentionally written for churches at different stages. A parish with no formal planned giving program can begin with the first five sections. A parish with an established endowment can use the later sections to strengthen policies, communications, donor recognition, and long-term stewardship.

A ministry before a program

Planned giving should not begin with tax techniques or financial products. It begins with gratitude, stewardship, and a conversation about what a person hopes the Church will continue to do for future generations.

Important Notice

This toolkit provides general educational information and sample language. It is not legal, tax, accounting, or investment advice. Churches should have policies and legal documents reviewed by qualified counsel. Donors should be encouraged to consult their own attorney, tax advisor, and financial advisor before completing a planned gift.

1. Understanding Planned Giving

A planned gift is a charitable gift that is arranged as part of a donor's overall financial or estate plan. Some planned gifts are received during the donor's lifetime; many are received in the future through an estate, retirement account, life insurance policy, trust, or other beneficiary arrangement.

1.0 Why planned giving matters to a church

It gives parishioners a way to make a lasting statement of faith and gratitude.

It can strengthen endowments and other long-term funds that support ministry across generations.

It broadens stewardship beyond annual pledging and capital campaigns.

It creates natural opportunities for pastoral conversations about legacy, family, values, and faithful preparation.

It helps normalize good estate planning, including wills, beneficiary designations, and advance planning.

1.1 Planned giving is different from annual stewardship

Annual Stewardship	Capital Giving	Planned Giving
Supports current-year ministry	Funds a defined project or campaign	Often supports future ministry or endowment
Usually from current income	Usually from accumulated assets and income	Often from estate or accumulated assets
Typically renewed annually	Usually time-limited	Often a once-in-a-lifetime legacy decision

1.2 Is Your Church Ready?

A church does not need to be large or wealthy to begin planned giving. It does need clear leadership, trustworthy financial practices, and a willingness to communicate consistently.

Readiness checklist

- ☐ Vestry and rector agree that planned giving is a ministry priority.
- ☐ The church has a clear mission and can articulate how legacy gifts will advance it.
- ☐ Financial reporting is timely and transparent.
- ☐ Existing endowment or designated funds are clearly documented.
- ☐ The church has, or is willing to adopt, a gift acceptance policy.
- ☐ The church can identify at least two or three lay leaders who will champion the effort.
- ☐ The parish is prepared to communicate about planned giving more than once a year.
- ☐ The church has a process for acknowledging and recording donor intentions.

Start small

A strong first-year goal may simply be to adopt core policies, offer one educational program, communicate quarterly, and invite parishioners to notify the church if they have included it in their estate plans.

1.3. Building the Leadership Structure

The rector

The rector provides theological and pastoral leadership, helps frame legacy giving as stewardship, and identifies appropriate moments for conversation. The rector does not need to become a technical planned giving expert.

The vestry

The vestry establishes policies, provides fiduciary oversight, authorizes endowment structures, and helps ensure that donor intent is honored.

The planned giving or legacy committee

3-6 members is often sufficient.

Include respected parishioners who understand stewardship and can maintain confidentiality.

Financial, legal, communications, and pastoral experience can be helpful, but technical expertise is not required of every member.

Establish clear terms, responsibilities, and reporting to the vestry.

Suggested committee responsibilities

Maintain the annual communications calendar.

Coordinate educational programs.

Review planned giving materials for consistency.
 Promote the Legacy Society.
 Ensure donor intentions are acknowledged and documented.
 Review policies periodically and recommend updates to the vestry.

1.4. Creating or Strengthening an Endowment

An endowment is a long-term pool of assets established to support the church's mission over time. The principal is generally invested, while a prudent portion is made available for ministry according to the fund's governing terms and spending policy.

Questions to answer before creating an endowment

What is the purpose of the fund?
 Who has authority to accept gifts and approve distributions?
 Will the fund accept restricted gifts? Under what conditions?
 How will assets be invested and overseen?
 What spending policy will apply?
 How will the fund be reported to the congregation?
 What happens if a restriction becomes impracticable or obsolete?

Common endowment purposes

Unrestricted ministry and mission
 Outreach and community ministry
 Buildings and capital preservation
 Music and worship
 Christian formation
 Clergy or staff support
 Scholarships or education

Avoid over-restriction

Highly specific restrictions can become difficult to administer decades later. Whenever possible, encourage language that expresses the donor's intent while giving the church reasonable flexibility to respond to future ministry needs.

1.5. Policies Every Church Should Consider

Policies protect both the donor and the church. They create consistency, reduce misunderstandings, and help future leaders honor decisions made today.

Policy	Purpose
Gift Acceptance Policy	Defines which gifts the church may accept, who may approve unusual gifts, and when professional review is required.
Endowment Policy	Defines purpose, governance, donor restrictions, distributions, and administration.
Investment Policy	Establishes objectives, risk parameters, oversight responsibilities, and investment approach.
Spending Policy	Defines how much may be distributed from long-term funds and how distributions are calculated.
Memorial/Named Fund Policy	Explains when named funds may be established and how small or temporary restricted balances will be handled.
Donor Recognition & Confidentiality Policy	Clarifies how donors are recognized and how anonymous or confidential intentions are treated.

Gift acceptance: gifts that merit special review

Real estate
 Closely held business interests
 Tangible personal property
 Gifts with significant restrictions
 Life insurance requiring future premium payments
 Gifts that may create environmental, legal, or financial liability

2.0 Ways Parishioners Can Make Planned Gifts

Church communications should emphasize that planned giving is accessible. A meaningful legacy gift does not require extraordinary wealth.

Gift Type	How It Works	Why It May Appeal
Bequest in a will or trust	Donor names the church for a dollar amount, percentage, specific asset, or share of the residuary estate.	Simple and familiar; can be changed during life.
Beneficiary designation	Church is named on an IRA, retirement plan, life insurance policy, or eligible financial account.	Often completed using a beneficiary form rather than a will.
Retirement assets	Church is named as a beneficiary of some or all retirement assets.	Can be an efficient charitable asset for some estates; donor should seek tax advice.
Life insurance	Church is named as beneficiary or, in some cases, owner of a policy.	Can create a future gift with a beneficiary designation.
Appreciated securities	Donor transfers publicly traded securities to the church or its charitable partner.	May offer tax advantages compared with selling first; donor should seek advice.
Donor-advised fund	Donor recommends grants during life; succession options may include charitable beneficiaries.	Useful for organized charitable giving; rules vary by sponsoring organization.
Charitable trust or other advanced arrangement	A donor works with professional advisors to structure income and charitable interests.	Appropriate for more complex situations and requires professional advice.

Note: Tax treatment varies by donor, asset, and applicable law. The church should not provide individualized tax or legal advice.

2.1. Wills and Estate Planning Education

One of the most valuable services a church can offer is education that helps parishioners put their affairs in order. The invitation to consider a charitable legacy can be included naturally within that broader conversation.

Why every adult needs a will: A will helps direct assets, name fiduciaries, and reduce uncertainty for loved ones.

Trusts: Trusts can help manage assets during life and after death and may be appropriate in some family situations.

Statutory durable power of attorney: Allows a trusted person to handle financial matters if the individual cannot.

Medical power of attorney: Allows a trusted person to make healthcare decisions when the individual cannot communicate.

Advance directives: Communicate wishes about certain medical treatment and end-of-life decisions.

Beneficiary designations: Retirement plans, life insurance, and some accounts pass according to beneficiary forms, which should be reviewed periodically.

Organizing important documents: Families should know where key legal, financial, insurance, and account information is securely stored.

Legacy beyond family: Estate planning can also express faith and values through charitable gifts.

Funeral Planning: Families should know the wishes; the church should know how to honor them to reflect the faith and values of the deceased. Is there a columbarium?

Pastoral framing

Estate planning education should never be presented as a fundraising tactic. The first objective is to help parishioners care well for themselves and their families. A charitable legacy is an additional opportunity, not an obligation.

2.2. Inviting a Gift to the Church

The most effective planned giving invitation is clear, gentle, and specific. Parishioners should understand that gifts of every size are meaningful.

Four messages to repeat

1. Remember your family and loved ones first.
2. Consider the people and organizations that have shaped your life and faith.
3. A gift to your church can be a percentage of an estate; it does not need to be a fixed dollar amount.
4. Please let the church know about your intention if you are comfortable doing so, so we can thank you and understand your wishes.

Sample bequest language - unrestricted

I give [___% of my estate / the sum of \$___ / the following property] to [LEGAL NAME OF CHURCH], a nonprofit organization located at [ADDRESS], to be used for its general charitable and religious purposes.

Sample bequest language - endowment

I give [___% of my estate / the sum of \$___] to [LEGAL NAME OF CHURCH], a nonprofit organization located at [ADDRESS], to be added to and administered as part of the Church endowment, subject to the governing policies of the Church.

Churches should have sample language reviewed by local counsel and confirm the correct legal name, address, and tax identification information before publication.

2.3. Creating a Legacy Society

A Legacy Society recognizes people who have made a future gift commitment to the church. Its purpose is gratitude and community, not status.

Recommended design

Membership: anyone who has informed the church of a planned or estate gift.

No minimum gift amount. (unless a restricted gift)

Gift amount need not be disclosed.

Anonymous membership should be available.

Recognition should be tasteful and consistent with parish culture.

Offer at least one annual thank-you or stewardship gathering.

Keep a confidential record of known intentions and any documented restrictions.

Possible names

Legacy Society • Heritage Society • Generations Society • The [Parish Name] Legacy Circle
• The 18__ Society (using the parish's founding year)

Recognition is not a contract

A revocable estate intention may change. Recognition should thank the donor for the intention without treating the future gift as an irrevocable pledge or current receivable.

2.4. Talking About Planned Giving

When conversations arise naturally

After a stewardship or endowment presentation

When a parishioner asks about memorial gifts

During retirement or life-transition conversations

When a parishioner mentions updating a will

After a significant gift of appreciated assets

When discussing a ministry the parishioner deeply values

Conversation starters

“Have you had a chance to think about the people and ministries you want your estate plan to remember?”

“What ministries of this parish would you most like to see continue for the next generation?”

“If you are updating your estate plan, would it be helpful if I gave you the church's legal information and sample bequest language?”

“We have a Legacy Society for parishioners who have included the church in their plans. There is no minimum gift and no need to tell us the amount.”

What not to do

Do not ask a parishioner to disclose net worth or estate size.

Do not give legal or tax advice.

Do not pressure someone during grief, illness, or vulnerability.

Do not promise that a highly restricted gift can be accepted before review.

Do not discuss another donor's plans without permission.

2.5. A Year-Round Communications Plan

Month	Theme	Suggested Message
January	New year / legacy	Encourage review of wills and beneficiary designations.
February	Faith and values	Short story about how legacy supports future ministry.
March	Education	Newsletter: What is planned giving?
April	Endowment	Explain how the parish endowment supports mission.
May	Family preparation	Promote an estate-planning seminar.
June	Beneficiary designations	Remind parishioners that some assets pass outside a will.
July	Legacy story	Feature a historical or living example, with permission.
August	Make-A-Will Month	Offer will/estate-planning education and sample church language.
September	Stewardship	Connect lifetime stewardship with legacy stewardship.
October	Legacy Society	Invite notification of existing estate intentions.
November	Gratitude	Thank those who have remembered the church in their plans.
December	Year-end planning	Distinguish current gifts from future planned gifts;

encourage advisor
consultation.

2.6. Educational Programs for Parishioners

Program 1: Wills and Estate Planning 101

40-45 minutes plus questions

Presenter: estate-planning attorney or qualified professional

Topics: wills, trusts, powers of attorney, advance directives, beneficiary designations, organizing documents

Close with a brief invitation to consider charitable legacy; avoid turning the program into a solicitation

Program 2: Planned Giving Sunday

Short stewardship reflection in worship or announcements

Adult formation session after worship

Legacy Society information table

Printed sample bequest language and church legal information

Invitation to a confidential follow-up conversation

Program 3: Monday Minute

A short weekly communication series can make estate planning less intimidating.

Suggested sequence:

Why Every Adult Needs a Will

What Is a Trust?

Statutory Durable Power of Attorney

Medical Power of Attorney

Advance Directives

Beneficiary Designations Matter

Organizing Important Documents

Your Legacy Beyond Family

Program 4: Family Legacy Conversation

A pastoral adult-formation session on how to talk with family about values, end-of-life wishes, funeral preferences, important documents, charitable intentions, and the stories or faith commitments a person hopes to pass on.

3.0 Receiving and Acknowledging Planned Gifts

When notified of an estate intention

1. Thank the donor promptly and warmly.
2. Do not require disclosure of the gift amount for recognition.
3. Ask whether the donor is willing to complete a nonbinding legacy intention form.
4. Confirm the legal name of the church and intended purpose.
5. If the gift is restricted, review the restriction before indicating acceptance.
6. Record the information securely and limit access.
7. Invite the donor to the Legacy Society unless anonymity is requested.
8. Maintain periodic stewardship contact without repeatedly asking for updated values.

When an estate gift is received

1. Confirm the source and any governing documentation.
2. Determine whether restrictions apply.
3. Follow the church's gift acceptance and endowment policies.
4. Coordinate with legal counsel when necessary.
5. Provide appropriate acknowledgment to the executor, trustee, or family.
6. Record the gift accurately in church financial records.
7. Report the gift to the vestry in a manner consistent with confidentiality.
8. Communicate impact to the congregation without disclosing confidential information.

3.1. Investing and Managing Legacy Gifts

Receiving a legacy gift creates a stewardship responsibility. Long-term funds should be governed with the same care that the donor used in making the gift.

Define the purpose of each fund clearly.

Maintain written investment and spending policies.

Use appropriate diversification and professional oversight.

Monitor fees and performance in the context of long-term objectives.

Preserve records of donor restrictions.

Provide regular reporting to vestry and appropriate committees.

Review policies periodically rather than reacting to short-term markets.

Ensure succession and continuity of oversight as parish leaders change.

EFD's role

The Episcopal Foundation of Dallas provides investment management and planned giving resources for Episcopal churches, schools, and missions, including educational materials, endowment support, and policy templates.

3.2. Building a Culture of Legacy

The goal is not a campaign that appears once every few years. The goal is a parish culture in which legacy stewardship is a normal, gracious part of Christian formation.

Seven habits of strong programs

1. Talk about legacy every year.
2. Tell stories more often than you explain techniques.
3. Keep the invitation simple and inclusive.
4. Educate before soliciting.
5. Thank people consistently.
6. Connect gifts to ministry and mission.
7. Maintain policies and records so future leaders can steward gifts well.

Measure what matters

Number of parishioners attending educational programs
 Number of known Legacy Society members
 Number of planned giving conversations requested
 Number of new documented estate intentions
 Growth in unrestricted and endowment legacy gifts over time
 Consistency of communications and policy review

Avoid evaluating the program only by the dollar value of known intentions. Many donors will not disclose amounts, and future values can change.

3.3. Ready-to-Use Templates

A. Bulletin announcement

Your stewardship can continue beyond your lifetime. A gift to [PARISH NAME] through your will, trust, retirement account, or other beneficiary designation can help sustain worship, formation, outreach, and ministry for generations to come. If you have already included the church in your plans, or would like simple information to share with your advisor, please contact [NAME/TITLE].

B. Newsletter article

WHAT WILL YOUR LEGACY MAKE POSSIBLE?

For generations, faithful people have made gifts that helped build, sustain, and renew the ministries we cherish today. Planned giving offers each of us an opportunity to do the same for those who will come after us.

A planned gift may be as simple as including [PARISH NAME] in your will or naming the church as a beneficiary of a retirement account or life insurance policy. Gifts of every size matter. You may choose to support the church's general mission or, when appropriate, its endowment.

Your first responsibility is to your loved ones. After providing for them, we invite you to consider whether your estate plan might also reflect the faith and ministries that have been important in your life. For information, contact [NAME/TITLE]. Please consult your own legal and tax advisors.

C. Legacy Society invitation

You are invited to become part of the [LEGACY SOCIETY NAME], a community of parishioners and friends who have chosen to remember [PARISH NAME] in their estate or long-term charitable plans.

There is no minimum gift amount, and you do not need to disclose the value of your gift. By letting us know of your intention, you allow us to thank you, understand your wishes, and welcome you into this circle of faithful stewards. Anonymous participation is always available.

D. Nonbinding legacy intention form

Name(s): _____

Address: _____

Email/Phone: _____

I/We have included [PARISH NAME] in my/our estate or long-term charitable plans through:

☐ Will or trust ☐ Retirement account ☐ Life insurance ☐ Other: _____

Intended purpose (optional): _____

☐ General purposes ☐ Endowment ☐ Other: _____

☐ I/We may be listed as Legacy Society member(s).

☐ I/We prefer to remain anonymous.

This form is an expression of current charitable intent only and is not a binding pledge or legal obligation.

Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

E. Thank-you letter for a documented intention

Dear [NAME],

Thank you for letting us know that you have included [PARISH NAME] in your estate plans. Your decision is a meaningful expression of faith and a gift to generations of people we may never meet.

We are grateful for your commitment to the future ministry of this parish. We will honor the confidentiality and preferences you have shared with us. Because estate plans can change, we understand that your intention is not a binding pledge.

Most of all, thank you for the many ways you are part of the life and ministry of [PARISH NAME].

Faithfully,

[RECTOR / WARDEN / APPROPRIATE LEADER]

F. Sample rector announcement

Many of the ministries we enjoy today were made possible by people who came before us - people who loved this church and wanted its work to continue beyond their own lifetimes. As you review your will and estate plans, I invite you to consider whether [PARISH NAME] might be part of the legacy you leave. Your family comes first, and there is no expected gift amount. This is simply another way our stewardship can express gratitude, faith, and hope for generations to come.

G. Sample website copy

PLANNED GIVING

A legacy gift is a lasting way to support the mission and ministry of [PARISH NAME]. You may choose to remember the church in your will or trust, name the church as a beneficiary of a retirement account or life insurance policy, or explore other charitable arrangements with your professional advisors.

Gifts of every size are meaningful. If you have already included [PARISH NAME] in your plans, we would be honored to thank you. Contact [NAME/TITLE] for our legal information, sample bequest language, or information about the [LEGACY SOCIETY NAME].

H. Sample gift acceptance policy framework

1. Purpose and authority
2. Gifts generally accepted without special review
3. Gifts requiring review (real estate, closely held interests, tangible property, restricted gifts, certain insurance interests)
4. Donor restrictions
5. Professional advice and conflicts of interest
6. Valuation and appraisal responsibility
7. Costs associated with gifts
8. Confidentiality and donor recognition
9. Authority to decline a gift
10. Policy review and amendment

This framework should be adapted and reviewed by qualified legal counsel before adoption.

I. Sample endowment policy framework

1. Purpose of the endowment
2. Fund categories and donor restrictions
3. Governance and oversight
4. Investment objectives
5. Spending/distribution policy
6. Treatment of additions and withdrawals
7. Accounting and reporting
8. Use of professional investment management
9. Modification of restrictions when legally permissible

10. Policy review and amendment

This framework is educational and should be reviewed by counsel and appropriate financial professionals.

3.4. 90-Day Launch Plan

Phase	Actions
Days 1-30: Prepare	Rector and vestry agree on objectives; identify committee; inventory existing endowment documents; confirm church legal name and tax information; begin gift acceptance/endowment policy review.
Days 31-60: Build	Approve core policies; choose Legacy Society name; create a confidential intention form; prepare website/bulletin copy; schedule an estate-planning education program.
Days 61-90: Launch	Introduce the ministry to the congregation; publish first planned giving article; hold educational event; invite parishioners with existing intentions to notify the church; begin quarterly committee reporting.

First-year scorecard

- ☐ Core policies reviewed/adopted
- ☐ Planned giving/legacy committee active
- ☐ Legacy Society established
- ☐ Website planned giving page published
- ☐ At least four planned giving communications completed
- ☐ At least one parishioner education program held
- ☐ Process established for confidential donor intention records
- ☐ Annual review date placed on vestry/committee calendar

4.0 Episcopal Foundation of Dallas Resources

4.1 How EFD can help a parish

Discuss how to begin or strengthen a planned giving ministry.
 Provide educational and communications resources.
 Help churches think through endowment structure and governance.
 Share policy templates for adaptation and professional review.
 Support long-term investment management and reporting.
 Provide educational programming for clergy, vestries, committees, and parishioners.

4.2 EFD Handouts and worksheets

1. Is an Endowment Right for your Church Worksheet
2. Sample Endowment Creation Document
3. Sample policies (gift acceptance, distribution/spending, investment)
4. Planned Giving Gift Chart
5. Rector Planned Giving Conversation Starters

Episcopal Foundation of Dallas

5923 Royal Lane • Dallas, Texas 75230
episcopalfoundationdallas.org