

BASIC PLANNING DOCUMENTS

Let's start by reviewing the three basic estate planning documents — a will, a durable power of attorney for finances and a durable power of attorney for healthcare.

Current Will

Your will is a written document, signed by you and by two or more witnesses. In some states, your signature must be witnessed by a notary public. If the will is authenticated by the probate court, it will be used to determine the distribution of your property. If the will is not valid or you do not have a will, the court will follow state law to distribute your assets and appoint guardians for minor children. Many of the court's decisions may be contrary to your desires. With a valid will, you are able to choose who will inherit your property and who will administer your estate as executor or personal representative. If you have minor children, you can choose a person to raise your children. With a trust, you are permitted to decide who will manage the trust for family members. A valid will is an essential part of transferring your property at the right time to the right people at the lowest cost. Without a valid will your family may encounter increased costs, delays and unnecessary conflicts. You can provide a wonderful legacy for your family that includes gifts to your United Methodist church or favorite ministry, with an updated will and a sound estate plan.

Durable Power of Attorney for Finances

You probably are a very good financial manager. As long as you are able to manage your affairs, things will be fine. However, there may come a time when you are in poor health or perhaps in the hospital. During these times, you will not want to worry about your property being neglected or bills going unpaid. A durable power of attorney for finances is the solution to protect your property and yourself. If you are no longer able to manage your property, you can use a durable power of attorney to select someone to act as your agent. If you are disabled or incapacitated, this person will have the legal right to manage your property. If you do not have a durable power of attorney for finances, the court may decide to appoint a conservator to manage your affairs. The court may select any person as conservator and there often will be expensive reports, audits and costs in the management of your property. If you sign a durable power of attorney for finances, the person that you select may manage your property without the added expense of a court-appointed conservator.

Healthcare Directives

There are two general types of healthcare directives — a durable power of attorney for healthcare and a living will. In Georgia, they are combined into one document called an advanced directive. The durable power of attorney for healthcare allows you to select a person who can assist your doctors in making healthcare decisions while you may be incapacitated. You may have a serious medical condition and the doctor will need the advice of another person regarding the best possible care for you. Your designated holder of the durable power of attorney for healthcare can help the doctors ensure that you have high-quality care. The living will covers the time before you pass away. In the last days and weeks of life, there are a number of decisions regarding care, nutrition, hydration and resuscitation that need to be made. The living will gives you the opportunity to offer recommendations to medical staff about the types of care to be provided to you at that time.

If you are interested in obtaining a copy of our free Legacy Ministry Guide to Wills and Trusts simply contact us at billcoffeen@duewest.org.