

# The Stewpot

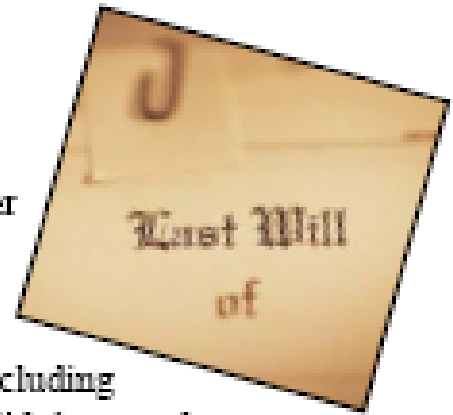
A potpourri of practical  
ideas to help you become  
a better steward

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## Where There's a Will

By Jeff Wilson

All of the money, property, goods, and other personal valuables change hands once every generation. It has always been that way. No one has been able to "take it with them." Even Egyptian pharaohs, although given an expensive sendoff including gold, precious stones, food, sailing vessels, etc., didn't get to keep their possessions. That which wasn't pilfered by grave robbers has been appropriated by archeologists!



### Failure to Plan

The majority of intelligent, otherwise well organized, and in-charge people fail to plan when it comes to preparing estate transfer documents. Families are left in the lurch. Christians forget to return to God a portion of the goods He so generously loaned them.

In the Western world estate planning is done by only 50% or less of the people. This amazing lack of planning is not because of a shortage of competent and effective attorneys, financial planners, trust officers, and others who are available to provide assistance. Nor can it be because of ignorance of the topic. Almost every day one

can read articles in newspapers, magazines, brochures, and in the electronic media. But there is an uneasiness regarding our mortality, as if estate planning might hasten the day of our demise.

### Viktoriya Evseyeva's Story

When I traveled to the former Soviet Union last summer, I didn't expect to find anyone with experience in will preparation. After all, for decades under the former regime it was virtually impossible to own property or make transfers to relatives. There had been no promotion of Trust Services anywhere in the division.

Stewardship is a total lifestyle. It involves our health, time, talents, environment, relationships, spirituality and finances.

As I stood in front of a group of 25 pastors in the Ukraine, I thought my presentation as well as my English would be foreign. I took a deep breath and asked, "Have any of you ever received a bequest to your church from a church member's will?"

I was gratified to see a half dozen hands raised. The first was the hand of Michael Gerdt, a Kiev pastor. He told of Viktoria Dmitrievna Evseyeva. She was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church on June 16, 1995. Between her baptism and her death she faithfully attended church each week and eagerly served as church organist.

In 1999, as the newly assigned pastor of the Kiev Adventist Church #11, Pastor Gerdt visited Victoria.

Despite her age she was active in the church and eager to tell everyone about Jesus. She never married and had no close relatives. Her joy was belonging to God's family. Her church became the only loving family she ever experienced. But she was thinking of signing away her apartment to a non-Adventist friend. Pastor Gerdt asked if she was aware of God's will regarding property. She said she did not know anything about that.

The next day the pastor brought her Ellen White's *Counsels*

on *Stewardship*. She was eager to read it. On page 328 she read: "Let it ever be kept in mind that the present selfish system of disposing of property is not God's plan, but man's device. Christians should be reformers, and break up this present system, giving an entirely new aspect to the formation of wills. Let the idea be ever present that it is the Lord's property which you are handling. The will of God in this matter is law."

The words, while new and unfamiliar, driven by the Holy Spirit, made a deep impression. One Sabbath Viktoria approached her pastor. She said she had decided to bequeath her apartment to her church.

Sister Viktoria died in early 2007. Several years earlier she had prepared her Christian will, properly signing and registering it. She bequeathed her apartment, worth about 1,800,000 rubles (US\$70,000) to God's work. By Western standards, her poverty-level bequest represents a gift equal to a lifetime of personal income in her country.

With the changes that have occurred in Russia and Eastern Europe in recent years, families now have the opportunity to own real estate. Members have assets available to give through a will. Many



Victoria Evseyeva



other Viktoria Evseyevas are extending their stewardship beyond their lifetimes and making similar investments in heaven.

## **Gifts to the Belize Conference**

In the Inter-American Division, the Belize Conference of Seventh-day Adventists was blessed when Mrs. Lydia Worldsnorth Smith's executor turned into the mission \$256,000Bz (US\$128,000) and a house valued at \$80,000Bz (US\$40,000). Mrs. Smith had left specific instructions in her last will and testament to bless the church with her assets.

This \$336,000 Bz donation (US\$168,000) became the single most outstanding contribution aiding transition from mission to conference status. The cash down payment for a new headquarters came from this gift. The building supplied the needs of the mission and was perfect for the transition to conference status.

## **What God Says**

One day the prophet Isaiah was given a special assignment from the Lord. He was to go to King Hezekiah and give a direct verbatim message from the Ruler of the Universe. The message was so vital, so important, that it is recorded twice in Scripture. You'll find it in 2 Kings 20:1 and Isaiah 38:1. Here's what Hezekiah heard: "This is what the LORD says: Put your house in order, because you are going to die."

God was telling King Hezekiah directly that he was going to soon die. In preparation for death, he needed to "put [his] house in order." What did God mean?

The Bible is clear: "For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it" (1 Timothy 6:7 NIV). Therefore it makes sense that we should be making arrangements, as good stewards, to transfer our assets. We will provide for relatives and other dependents. But we should also remember our larger family. Ellen White says, "In disposing of your

**“In disposing of your property by will to your relatives, be sure that you do not forget God's cause” (Ellen White, *CS 328*).**

property by will to your relatives, be sure that you do not forget God's cause” (CS 328). She goes on to ask: “Would you make your property secure? Place it in the hand that bears the nail print of the crucifixion. Retain it in your possession, and it will be to your eternal loss. Give it to God, and from that moment it bears His inscription. It is sealed with His immutability. Would you enjoy your substance? Then use it for the blessing of the suffering” (9T 51).

## **Understanding Wills and Trusts**

Wills and trusts can appear to be daunting, but an attorney can take the complication out. He or she can explain your jurisdiction's laws regarding legal transfer instruments, can draft them for you, and then assist you in their execution.

You will find much assistance at [www.willplan.org](http://www.willplan.org). Also check for the Planned Giving icon on your conference or institution's website. You will find valuable information including the descriptions of various gifting documents (like wills, revocable and irrevocable trusts, charitable gift annuities, pooled income fund investments, etc.) all in plain English. A free online gift calculator is also available.

Lots of valuable information, or even a free, no obligation consultation, is also available from your conference or institutional Planned Giving & Trust Services friend. They are only a phone call or e-mail away. Their services are without cost or obligation. They can help you get on the way to completing the crowning act of stewardship.

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