

spring has sprung

SPRING HAS SPRUNG

Ah, spring. It's a time of hope and optimism. The days are getting warmer and longer. Perhaps you've noticed new buds on the trees, seen the first daffodils of the season pushing up from the flower beds, or spotted a red-breasted robin gathering twigs to build its nest. In our Christian faith, we celebrate the season of Easter and reflect upon the possibility of miracles. The lessons we learn from the Gospel and scripture provide context and guidance for the way we live our lives.

Spring is also a practical time. Many of us engage in spring-cleaning rituals. We scrub the residue of winter from our windows to let the sun shine in. We pack away our winter wardrobes, and we begin to prepare our yards and gardens for the upcoming season of planting and growing. And yes, we take stock of our financial situation as we prepare our taxes. These may not be the most enjoyable of tasks, but there is a feeling of satisfaction when they are completed.

As we put our houses in order, it is also a good time to consider the future. When was the last time you reviewed your will and estate plans? Do they reflect the current needs of yourself and your family? Do they take into account your financial status and accumulated assets? And do they reflect your values? Many people prepare their wills when they marry and start their families, then file them away and forget about them for years and even decades. As a result, these documents may not adequately address your responsibilities and wishes.

Other people have never even written a will at all. Not only can this create legal and financial difficulties for your heirs during a time of grief and

mourning, it means that others will make decisions for you about the distribution of your property. Will they know what you would have intended? Because these "others" include not only your family but also the government, which can place an onerous tax burden on your estate.

Your will is your ultimate testament. Keeping your plans up-to-date ensures that the people you care about most will be taken care of to the best of your ability. It is also an opportunity for you to leave a legacy that can help secure the future of charitable organizations, such as your church, whose work is important to you when you make them the beneficiary of a bequest. You can even create a planned gift such as a charitable gift annuity while you're still living that will provide income for you for the rest of your life, and will benefit the causes you care about when you are gone. Importantly, such a gift will make a statement about what was important to you during your lifetime, and enable the good works you valued most to continue into the future.

So celebrate the season. Give thanks for the coming of a new spring, sweep the cobwebs from your attic, take a walk, and enjoy. And don't forget to think about the future. Your future and the future of the people and places that are closest to your heart. Review your will to determine whether or not you want to make any updates. And if you haven't made your will yet, please do so. For the free booklet, *Planning for the End of Life*, or for more information about leaving a planned gift to your church, contact a planned giving committee member or the Episcopal Church Foundation at 800-697-2858 or www.EpiscopalFoundation.org for confidential advice. It will feel good to take care of this spring-cleaning task too.