



Why Have a Recognition Society in the Church?

Would the fact of a recognition society in the church lead to a sense of competition or of elitism? The answer to such a question is a resounding “No!” In fact, a recognition society for planned givers can:

1. Strengthen the current life of the congregation by building an atmosphere of generosity, openness and trust;
2. Encourage the resolve of potential planned givers by reminding them of the option of planned giving for their beloved church community; and
3. Affirm the joy of current planned givers in their having decided to give to the future ministries of the church.

In a world filled with busyness and constantly competing organizations, it is easy for even the most committed church members to forget about the possibility of endowing their annual church pledge or of making a planned gift to God’s work through the church. Providing a periodic in-person reminder helps them follow-through on what many members have intended to do all along. Such appropriate publicity motivates church members and friends to respond in a way that fits their own Christian values and involvements, suited to their unique situations.

As for those who have already made a planned gift, a recognition society in the congregation gives them the opportunity to witness to good stewardship and to their hope for the church’s future life and ministry. Such a decision is not a source of individual pride, but rather expresses their joy in giving, offers supportive relationships with others who have made similar decisions, and encourages them to continue to keep Christian ministries a priority in their wills or estate plans.

Recognition does not have to be intrusive, either to the donor or to the congregation. A simple form, on which donors can inform the church about an estate provision, is a useful way to formally establish society membership. (As an example, see the application form on this web page under “John Wesley Society Materials.”) The form invites donors to give specific local church leaders whatever information they are comfortable in providing. It makes it easy for donors to grant permission for their names to be included on the list of society members, and also has a box to check if they prefer to remain anonymous.

Likewise, recognizing planned givers in the church does not need to be complicated. Church leaders may choose one day a year (such as Memorial Sunday or All Saints Day) to acknowledge both past and present planned givers and share in a litany of thanksgiving for those who support God’s work through enduring gifts. Or the society might be lifted up each time a new planned gift is made to the church, all within the context of worship.