

Trustee

1 of 1 card **B-29**

A trustee is the steward and caretaker of resources, acting in trust on behalf of the whole congregation. In most churches trustees oversee and maintain the church property to assure that it adequately supports the mission of the church.

History and Background

Jesus spoke of the good steward. A steward was given charge of the property and goods of another and managed these goods according to the owner's purposes and aims on behalf of the owner. The word **trustee** evolved from the old Norse word **transt** which means **confidence**. In the church, trustee has come to mean those given charge of church property, confident that it will be used faithfully in the mission of the church. Your church's understanding of its purpose and aims probably determines how you manage the property.

Common Practices

Trustees sometimes are responsible for all matters of business management. In other churches their primary responsibility is for maintenance of the property. In some churches, people are elected to a church council and then appointed to serve as deacons, elders and trustees. Your church may not have trustees, but the responsibilities may be carried out by the governing

board or several committees, such as building and grounds, finance, stewardship, memorial and personnel.

Some trustees are chosen because people think they are frugal and careful and the church expenditures will stay within bounds under their leadership. Some trustees give in to the temptation to approach fiscal matters with the attitude of "How little can we do?" Others see their role as "protecting the pastor" from having to bother with such "unspiritual" things. But the Judeo-Christian tradition doesn't separate the body from the soul—or finances from mission—and the trustees need to ask, "How much can we do?"

For trustees there is tension between giving the highest priority to maintaining excellent facilities or to the mission of the church.

Responsibilities

Some or all of the following responsibilities are yours. You'll need to find out which are and which should be. Some responsibilities may be carried out by other committees. If so, the trustees may be represented on those committees or the committees' actions may be recommendations to the trustees. You may be responsible for:

- Understanding and upholding the mission of your church in all decisions.
- Clarifying your responsibilities.

- Understanding how property is the vehicle of the church's larger mission.
- Assuring that your church is accessible to and usable by persons with a variety of disabilities.
- Considering how facilities can be used in new ways to further the mission and whether the current use facilitates the mission. You'll need to talk with other groups in the church about possibilities.
- Establishing clear and workable directions, goals and plans of action.
- Developing a budget for use by the committee.
- Helping the congregation understand and value your task.
- Providing care, maintenance and improvement of church property, including buildings, grounds and furnishings. This will include regular inspection of the property, establishing priorities for repairs and improvements, providing for regular service on all equipment and taking care of emergencies.
- Supervising the custodian.
- Maintaining proper liability, property, bonding and workers' compensation insurance. This includes maintaining buildings in a manner that will keep insurance coverage costs low.
- Soliciting, selecting and accepting memorial gifts.
- Overseeing finances, including preparation of the budget, oversight of its operation and approval of unbudgeted expenses, and handling of endowments, other invested funds and loans.
- Providing services of a stewardship committee.
- Serving on a building committee.
- Providing services of a personnel committee.
- Determining who can use the church property, under what circumstances and at what cost.
- Determining who has a key to the church and keeping a record of it.
- Understanding the budgets of the wider church.
- Serving as the legal entity to act on behalf of the church in buying and selling property, signing contracts and borrowing or loaning funds.
- Attending meetings of the trustees and representing that board on other committees.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- Understanding of finances.
- Understanding of the work of trustees as related to mission.
- Sensitivity to needs and opportunities for mission.

- Respect of church members.
- Ability to relate well to the church staff.
- Understanding of the nature of the church.
- Knowledge of theology of stewardship.
- Understanding the purpose of budgeting.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Ask for a position description outlining responsibilities, expectations and accountability.
- Study Bible passages related to stewardship, such as Acts 5:1-11, 2 Corinthians 9:6-8, Mark 10:17-31 and Mark 12:38-44.
- Become familiar with building codes.
- Become familiar with insurance needs.
- Talk with other trustees about maintenance of the buildings and grounds.
- Participate in worship and prayer with other trustees at regular meetings or a retreat.
- Increase your personal spiritual life through daily Bible reading, meditation and prayer.

- Participate in planning the mission statement of the church and ways to carry it out.
- Use resources from the Stewardship Council of the United Church of Christ. Many are sent regularly to your church. See the **UCC Desk Calendar and Plan Book** resource section for more information. Order materials from United Church Resources. Telephone, toll-free, 800-325-7061.
- Talk with people who have been trustees.
- Attend workshops and seminars sponsored by your association or conference, ecumenical groups or colleges and universities on budgeting, property maintenance, and mission.
- Ask association and conference staff and leaders for help.

Issues Facing the Church

- Often trustees are chosen because they are recognized as cautious, careful people who will protect the church financially or because they have special skills in operating equipment or building maintenance. How can the concern for sound fiscal policy and building maintenance be balanced with concern for the mission and outreach of the church?

- What is the responsibility of the trustees to be committed to affirmative action and using women- and racial/ethnic-owned firms when signing contracts?
- The taxability of churches continues to be an issue. Should any part of church income or property be taxed? What are the implications?
- What is the responsibility of the trustees as good stewards of the earth's resources?
- Many church buildings are not accessible to persons with disabilities. What can your church do to become accessible?

Questions

- Which responsibilities are yours?
- If there are any responsibilities listed which do not seem to belong to anyone, how could these be taken care of?
- Do you have any responsibilities which are not listed in this card?

See: A-14 Covenant, A-16 Environment and Your Church, A-25 Ministry, A-26 Mission of Your Church, A-28 Nature of the Church, A-29 OCWM: Basic Support, A-34 Pastor's Family, A-36 Persons with Disabilities and the UCC, B-9 Committee Member, B-10 Custodian or Janitor or Sexton, B-11 Deacon, B-12 Elder, B-14 Financial Officer or Treasurer, B-28 Stewardship Committee

Member, C-5 Budgeting, C-14 Decision-Making, C-16 Employing Persons in Your Church, C-24 Investment Management, C-28 Memorial Gifts, C-33 Personnel Administration, C-34 Planning in the Local Church, C-37 Problem Solving, C-40 Property Maintenance, C-46 Salary Administration.