

Safety Deeding

The Church of God has historically believed that salvation makes one a member of the church. Influenced by our theology, we have never developed formal membership procedures or a process for joining the church. Most, perhaps all, of our congregations require something similar to the following to be a member in good standing in order to vote at a regular or special called business meeting:

1. must be 16 years of age or older,
2. must have been attending the church for at least six months prior to the meeting,
3. must be living in harmony with the doctrines and practices of the church.

This informal approach to membership is one of our greatest strengths. But, like any strength, has a weak side that makes local Church of God congregations potentially vulnerable to persons or groups taking over the church for the purpose of gaining control of the assets of the local congregation. While this vulnerability could be utilized by less than honorable people, a far greater fear is for a cult or other group to manipulate the vulnerability and gain control of property that has been dedicated to ministry for Christ. This involves persons or a group attending the church until the membership requirements are met (usually 6 months), having a majority present at a business meeting, and then taking control of the church and its assets in a hostile takeover.

Safety deeding assures a Church of God congregation that their property assets will remain part of the Church of God and will not be taken over by persons or a group not affiliated with the Church of God. Safety deeding involves adding Florida Church of God Ministries (FLCOGM) as a conditional party on the congregation's legal deed. The congregation continues to own the church property. This provision does not give FLCOGM any legal right to take over the church, close it, or sell it. The church property remains deeded in the name of the church. The safety deed requires that FLCOGM "sign off" before a property is deeded to a different name. Thus, it prevents the church from being taken over and sold.

FAQ

1. If a church safety deeds property to FLCOGM, who legally owns the property?

The local church does.

2. What if the local church wants to sell its property, such as to relocate, and it is safety deeded to FLCOGM?

A legal representative from FLCOGM would need to sign off on the sale. FLCOGM would routinely do this unless issues were raised by persons in the church concerning the legitimacy of the sale. If objections were raised, they would be investigated and responded to accordingly.

3. Can FLCOGM seize control of a church that is safety deeded or sell its property or close it down?

Absolutely not. The local church is the controlling owner of the facility and FLCOGM cannot usurp that ownership. A local church can choose to close, but it cannot be closed by FLCOGM.

4. What if a local church chooses to close, and it is safety deeded to FLCOGM?

By law a closed church must donate its assets to another not-for-profit 501(c)3. FLCOGM qualifies as such and safety deeding would dictate that the property be transferred to FLCOGM. The FLCOGM policy is to use the proceeds from such properties (minus administrative costs) to be used for church planting or church redevelopment.

5. How does a church safety deed its property to FLCOGM?

Contact FLCOG at 407.737.7633 to request a packet that explains the process.

6. How many churches are safety deeded to FLCOGM?

Most churches have chosen to safety deed their property to FLCOGM.