

CPFUMC and Google Docs

Google has created a very useful and free service called Google Docs. Google Docs are electronic documents (files) which live on the Internet (“in the cloud”). These documents can be written documents like reports and letters or they can be spreadsheets with tabs and embedded charts, slide show files, drawings and forms. The nice thing about Google Docs is that since they live in the cloud, others can collaborate with the document owner to update and extend them. This makes Google Docs a very useful tool for collaboration since, given appropriate permission, multiple people can access the same file, even simultaneously. The other nice thing about Google Docs is that there is no charge for storing them. You can make as many of them as you want without worrying about any online storage cost.

Background

In order to create a Google Doc, a person must have a Google account. Google accounts are free. Google accounts are identified by a Google ID and a password which are used to access the Google account. The typical Google ID looks a lot like a typical email address of the form

UniqueUserName@gmail.com

A Google account can also be created using a Google ID which is related to a non-Gmail email address such as

somebody@cpfumc.org

somebodyelse@att.net

or

yetanotherperson@hotmail.com

Along with each Google account comes the free Google email (Gmail) service. Gmail does have a free online storage limit of 15 GB before Google will start charging you for email storage. Although 15 GB is a **ton** of email storage, it makes sense to keep your Gmail inbox empty and to empty your Gmail trashcan.

When you make a Google account, you have now joined the Google “Borg” (remember Star Trek?) Besides Gmail, you also have access to Google maps, YouTube and, of course, Google Docs and a host of other free Google services.

Google Doc Ownership and Sharing

The creator of a Google Doc “owns” the document by virtue of having created it using his/her free Google account and free Google storage space. The owner/creator of each Google Doc is free to share it with others.

When an owner shares a Google Doc, the owner can specify **how** the document is to be shared by assigning rights or permissions. A Google Doc can be shared with another person as long as the creator/owner of the Google Doc knows the email address of the person with whom they wish to share the document. Google Docs have three levels of sharing rights or permissions:

- **Edit** – The owner/creator allows the document to be available for viewing, commenting and editing by the collaborator on the shared document.
- **Comment** – The owner/creator allows the document to be available for viewing and commenting only. The collaborator cannot edit the document.
- **View** – The collaborator on the shared document can only view the document; they cannot comment on or edit the document.

Once the creator/owner of the Google Doc has created the document in the cloud, they can click on the big **Share** button, type in an email address, assign a permission level and *bingo* the sharing recipient is notified by email with a link to a shared Google Doc on which they have been invited to collaborate.

OK, that's the basics about Google Docs. Why am I telling you all of this about Google Docs?

CPFUMC and Google Docs – A Long-Term Document Retention Strategy

Our church has been using a number of Google docs. It is much easier to share information and collaborate in a Google doc than it is to email around a Word file or an Excel spreadsheet. Google Docs make it possible to collaborate easily.

Google docs live online, so we can capture their location and make them available permanently for historical review, future extension or use as a template for a new document. Google Docs help us preserve our institutional knowledge as we pass it on to future generations.

An example of this is our annual budget spreadsheet, *Making the 20xx Budget*. Multiple ministries can collaborate in the same document by adding their Dream budget requests. When the Finance Committee meets and balances proposed spending with the expected income, the budget is finalized and ready for approval. Last years' budget with actual income and expense data is now available as a template for future budgets along with income and expense data which is built up year after year. This gives us more confidence that we are being fiscally prudent. If we did not save this information year after year in a "living" document, the budgeting process would be much more onerous.

Another example: Our Trustees use a shared Google Doc spreadsheet for our Master Inventory. This document is updated as we add, sell and change furniture, musical instruments, lawn and garden equipment, technology such as computers and telephones, and audio/visual equipment. It is constantly changing. We maintain serial numbers for equipment in case anything is stolen and we have estimated replacement costs for insurance purposes in case of a catastrophic loss.

CPFUMC Google Docs Ownership

Google Docs are created by a person with a Google account. That person then “owns” the document. For a Google Doc to have lasting value in our church setting, we need to ensure that Google Docs we want to keep and maintain for future use are owned by a Google account which will transcend the inevitable comings and goings of different personnel, changing roles, changing email addresses and Google accounts of church personnel and volunteers.

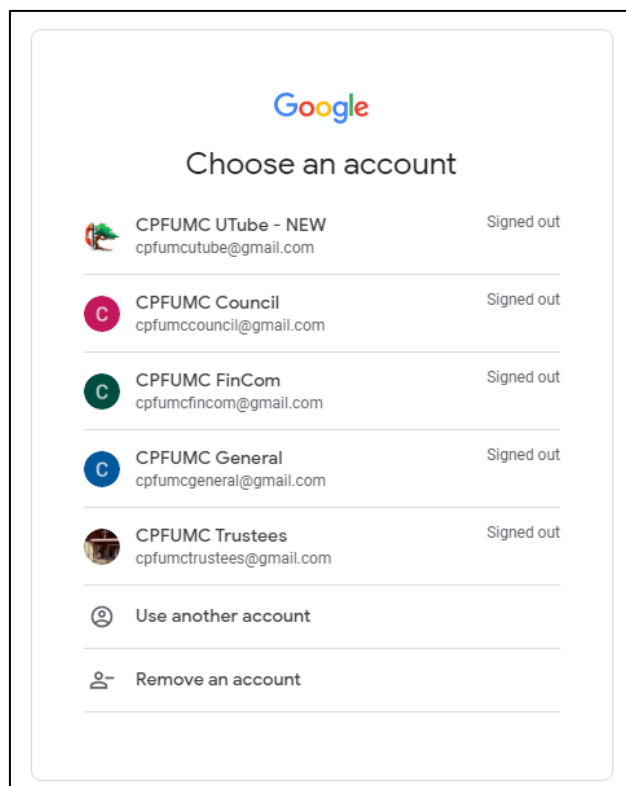
The best way to ensure lasting, stable ownership of CPFUMC Google Docs is to transfer ownership to a stable CPFUMC Google Doc Ownership account. Those Google Docs which we want to save for future use, historical reference or as a template will be assigned to one of these Ownership Accounts by the current owner of the document. The former owner and all others with whom the document has been shared will retain their assigned access permissions. The former owner will likely still retain edit rights to the document even though they no longer own it.

Five CPFUMC Google Doc Ownership accounts have been created for the purpose of lasting ownership:

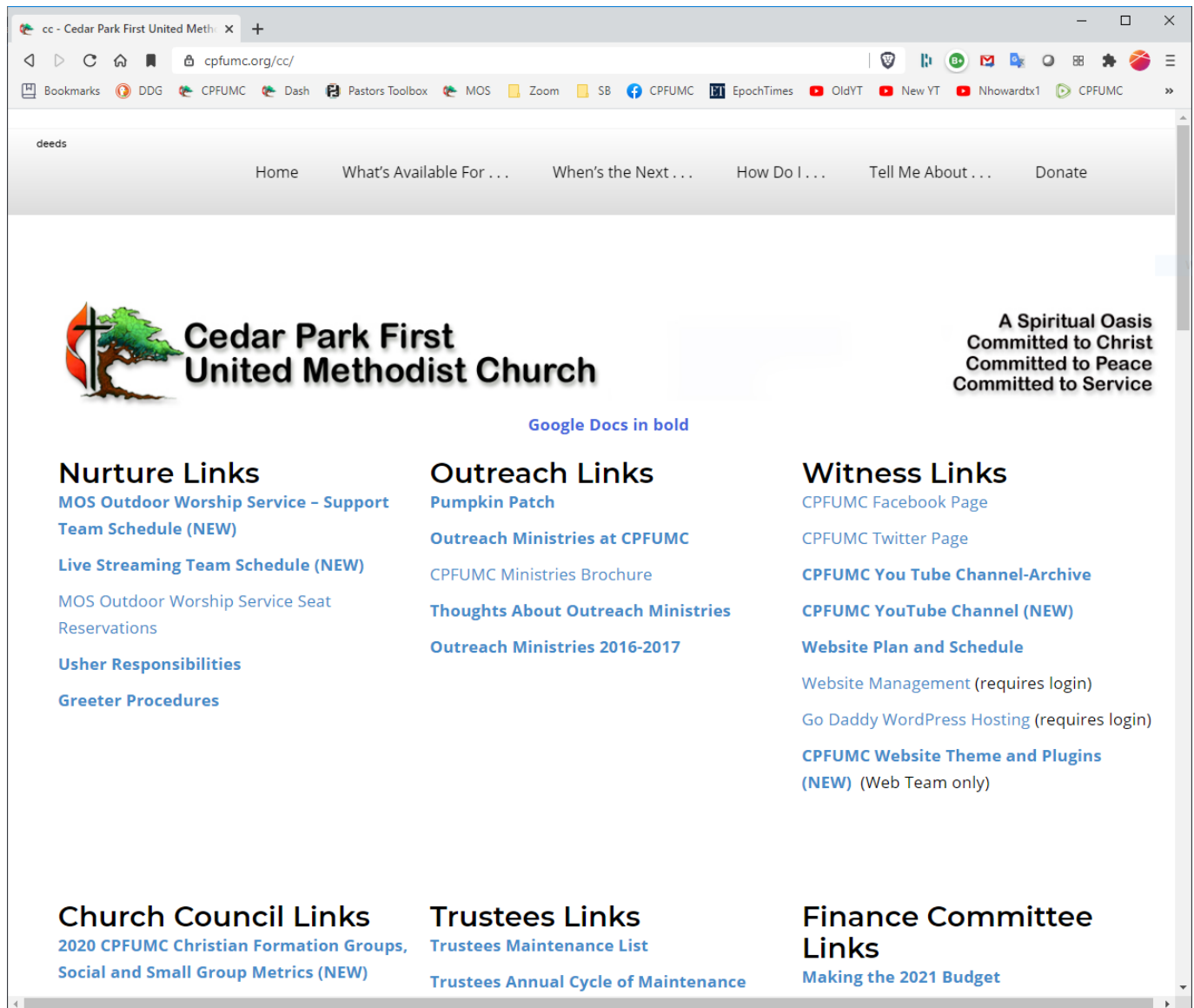
1. CPFUMCUTube@gmail.com – for the church new YouTube channel
2. CPFUMCCouncil@gmail.com – for long-lasting Church Council documents
3. CPFUMCTrustees@gmail.com – for long-lasting Trustees documents
4. CPFUMCFinCom@gmail.com – for long-lasting Finance Committee documents
5. CPFUMCGeneral@gmail.com – for long-lasting documents not in a category above

The password for each of these accounts is documented by the LAN Admin and will be shared with each appropriate ministry team leader.

Here is what these accounts might look like when you go to <https://www.google.com> and click on the sign in button:



If changes to the sharing scheme of a long-lasting document is required, the responsible committee chairperson (or anyone with Editor permission for the document) will log in, find the document, and modify the document sharing scheme to accommodate changes as people come and go.



Next Steps and Completion Plan

In order to implement this strategy of long-term document retention and online access, we should start with the Google Docs linked on our current Church Council web page at <https://cpfumc.org/cc/>:

As of December 22, 2020, of the 111 links on this web page, 72 (65%) are Google Docs. The remaining 39 links (35%) are to web addresses or permanent, unchanging PDF documents. For ease in distinguishing the Google docs from the other links, I have made the Google Docs links in **bold**.

To complete the Google Docs strategy, we need to find the owner of each Google Doc on the page and change the ownership so the appropriate CPFUMC Google Doc Ownership account. In those cases where the owner cannot be located or the owner's Google account has been locked or compromised in some way, a new replacement Google Doc will be created to match to original, then assigned to one of the CPFUMC Google Doc Ownership accounts.