

## Postal Service Moves to Clarify the Postmark

On Christmas Eve, the U.S. Postal Service (USPS) implemented a new rule intended to clarify what a postmark is and what information it conveys. Of particular interest to givers, tax filers, voters, and more, USPS emphasized that “the postmark date does not necessarily indicate the first day that the Postal Service had possession of the mailpiece.”

USPS said that this amendment to the Domestic Mail Manual does not actually change any of its current procedures for applying postmarks. However, the agency recognized that many third parties, including the IRS and numerous election jurisdictions, have used postmark dates as markers in their own rules, and it wanted to “**ensure that customers have a clear understanding of the postmark and what it means.**”

“Because most postmarks are applied at processing facilities,” said USPS, “they do not necessarily represent either the place at which, or the date on which, the Postal Service first accepted possession of the mailpiece.”

USPS also said that situations in which a mailing’s postmark date differs from when it originally arrived in a postal receptacle “will become more common” as it works to streamline and optimize its overall operations. In its new rule, the agency suggests that postal customers who want to ensure a postmark’s date can obtain a manually applied one at the retail counter of a local post office. They could also purchase a

Certificate of Mailing or send their pieces by Registered or Certified Mail.



While this postmark rule has implications for election mail, tax filings, and many other communications, ECFA member churches and ministries may particularly want to be mindful of its relevance in determining the date of delivery for donations, especially year-end gifts. Unless a check is postdated, the USPS postmark on the envelope enclosing it usually establishes the date of the donation. Donors wishing to assure the application of a gift to a specific tax year should be mindful of the USPS guidance on when a postmark may be applied, and they may also consider other online or in-person delivery methods.

ECFA will monitor any additional USPS deliberations about this matter and the agency's work to educate the public. For more details specifically about cash gift acknowledgements, please explore ECFA's [\*\*7 Essentials of Cash Gift Acknowledgments for Ministries\*\*](#) eBook.

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