



# A Good Death:

## What Church Leaders Need to Know About Death Preparation for Older Adults

# Thanks to Generous Givers



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Where do  
**YOU**  
serve?

**ATLANTIC  
OCEAN**

**Gulf of  
Mexico**

**Caribbean Sea**



# We all die, but we don't all die faithfully

It is the church's role to help us not only to live faithfully but also to die faithfully. This webinar is designed to aid church leaders who wish to guide others and themselves in dying faithfully.



# Two Types of Death Preparation

## Long-Term Preparation

1. Practical matters—Funeral planning, advanced directives, estate and legal issues.
2. Legacy leaving—From bucket lists to memoirs
3. Relationships—Including spiritual and communal.

## Last Minute Preparation

1. Overcoming the fear of the unknown and dealing with vulnerability
2. Naming and processing loss, plus grieving over what will be missed
3. Restoring hope and creating meaning

# Goals for This Webinar



To help define and describe what a “good death” looks like without fear, with expectation of what is next, and with gratitude for life.



To help initiate and frame conversations about death planning through practical considerations such as advanced directives, funeral pre-planning, modern equivalents to *Ars Moriendi*, and “good death” stories.



To provide information about available death preparation guides and other resources available from the Office on Aging and Older Adult Ministry

# Have You Ever Thought About Your Own Death?

How old are you? Where did you die? How you did you die?



# Good Death Defined

Defining “good death”-- There is no single definition of a good death. **Definitions will vary for each person.** The U.S. Institute of Medicine set a standard in 1997 when it defined a good death as:

**“free from avoidable distress** and suffering for patients, families, and caregivers; **in general accord with patients' families' wishes;** and **reasonably consistent** with clinical, cultural, and ethical standards.”



# Contrast Between Good and Bad Deaths

## Good Death

1. There is some control achieved through advanced planning.
2. Pain is managed, and the dying are comfortable with death—or welcome it.
3. The dying have completed or optimized relationships.
4. Cultural and spiritual beliefs and wishes have been honored.
5. The dying have had the time and energy to create a legacy.

## Bad Death

1. Few to no elements have been within the dying person or the family's control.
2. The dying person or family has experienced psychological, physical, or spiritual agony.
3. The dying person has unhealed and unfinished relationships.
4. The dying person's preferences have been ignored or defied.
5. The dying person is hindered from gifting anything of lasting value.

# Good Death Preparation Components

1. Control of psychological, physical, and spiritual symptoms.
2. Minimize last minute preparation.
3. Opportunity for closure or sense of completion of the life.
4. Good relationship with those present at the dying moment.
5. The ability to leave a lasting legacy.
6. Personalization of death and dying with dignity.
7. Ease the grieving process upon family and loved ones.



# Obstacles to Good Death Preparation

## Fear and Avoidance

1. Fear of the unknown
2. Business of living (busy-ness of life) and unpleasantness of task
3. Not knowing how or where to start in preparing for death
4. No roadmap or guidance about death and dying

## Loss and Denial

1. Experience of death conditioned upon grief, not dying
2. Death seen as failure, and the medical community preserving life at all costs
3. Negative images of death and dying
4. Not wanting to burden family or friends or to seem morbid



Death is one of the attributes you were created with;  
death is a part of you. Your life's continual task is to  
build your death. -- Montaigne



# Preparing for the Good Death Exam

## Clergy

1. Advanced Directives– Living Will, legal will, health care power of attorney, estate planning.
2. Funeral planning and obituary

## Laity

1. Death meet-up groups and death discussion groups
2. Grief and bereavement support groups



# Preparing for the Good Death Exam

## Clergy

1. Sermon series
2. Lenten Bible study
3. Spiritual assessments-  
(including death  
readiness/attitudes concerning  
dying)
4. Solution Focus Brief Therapy –  
Miracle Day Therapy

## Laity

1. Memoirs and legacy, bucket lists,  
ethical wills, etc.
2. Death preparation class or book  
study, video discussion
3. Practice of dedicated suffering



# Preparing for the Good Death Exam

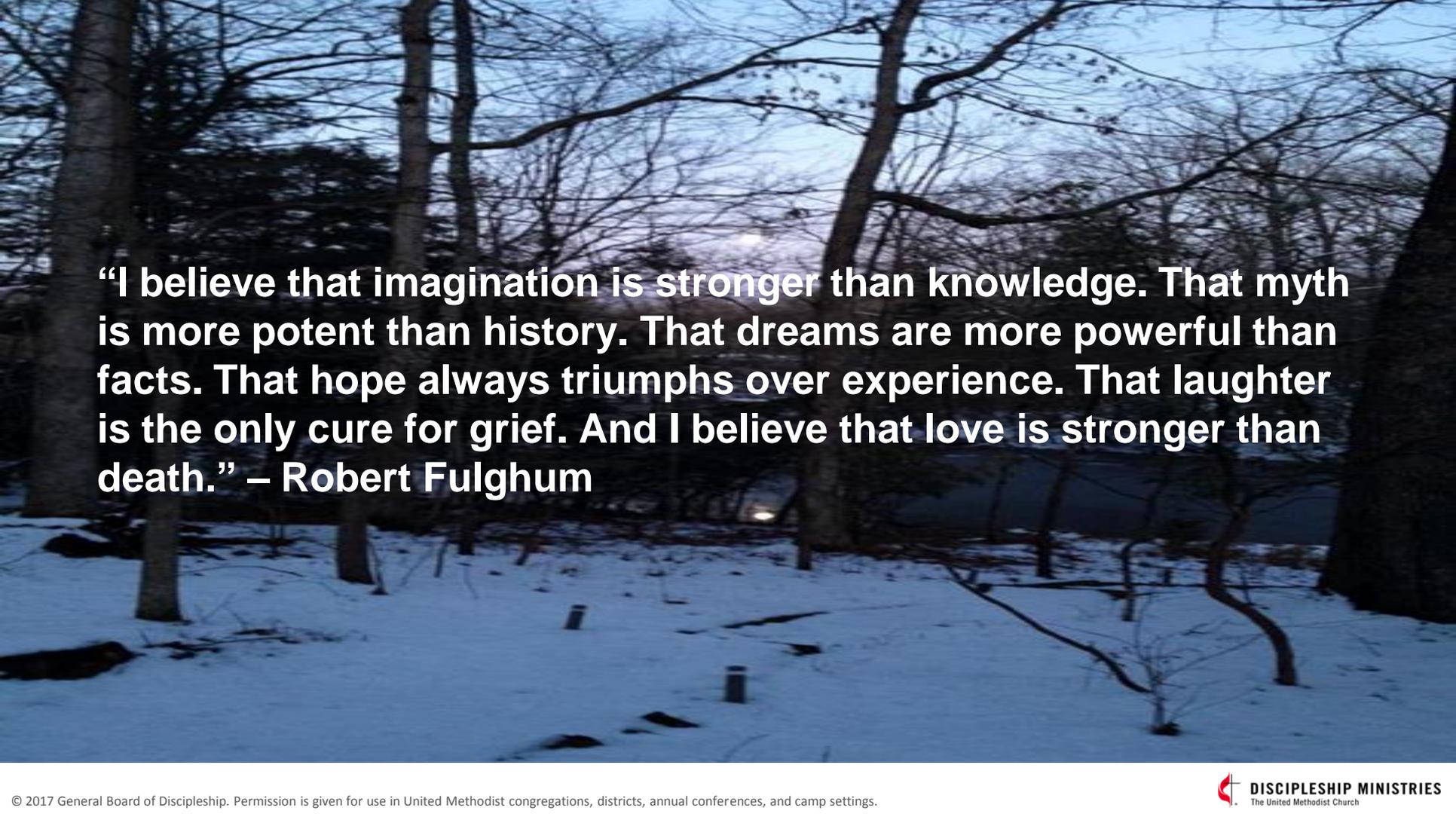
1. Humor and imagery to break down defense mechanisms
2. Use of imagination for positive outcomes.
3. Group dynamics—Safety in numbers
4. Faith formation and Christian education
5. Address fears
6. Unload burdens and process unfinished business
7. Processing work through grief and loss
8. Rediscover the spiritual gifts in death and dying



# Common Fears (and Losses)

1. Running out of time
2. Not having a future
3. Not done all the things that I wanted to do
4. The missed opportunities in my life
5. Death will include a lot of pain or suffering.
6. Not knowing what happens near the end of life
7. Death will happen soon.
8. The impact of death on loved ones
9. Being a burden to others
10. Not having said all that I wanted to say to the people I care about
11. Not having achieved life goals and ambitions
12. Death is prolonged or drawn out
13. My own death and dying
14. Death will happen suddenly or unexpectedly.
15. Death will happen when I am alone.



A photograph of a winter forest. The ground is covered in a layer of snow. Several trees with bare branches are scattered throughout the scene. The sky is a pale, hazy blue, suggesting a clear or slightly overcast day. The overall mood is quiet and serene.

**“I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge. That myth is more potent than history. That dreams are more powerful than facts. That hope always triumphs over experience. That laughter is the only cure for grief. And I believe that love is stronger than death.” – Robert Fulghum**

# Negative words are a barrier to preparation!

*We have many euphemisms to help protect us from the stark reality of our end. We do not even like to say the word. Here are some negative terms for death:*

Passed Away

Expired

CTB—Ceased to breath

Kicked the bucket

Checked out

Gave up the ghost

Crossed the great divide

Was called home

Bit the dust

Was taken from us

Succumbed

Lost his/her life

# Positive images set a stage for preparation!



# The Biblical Images for Death in the Bible Are Symbolic

## Analogy and Symbol

Sleep—And he slept with his  
Fathers

Seed-- Being planted and growing  
into new life

Going home or returning to God

Taken into a whirlwind

Journey

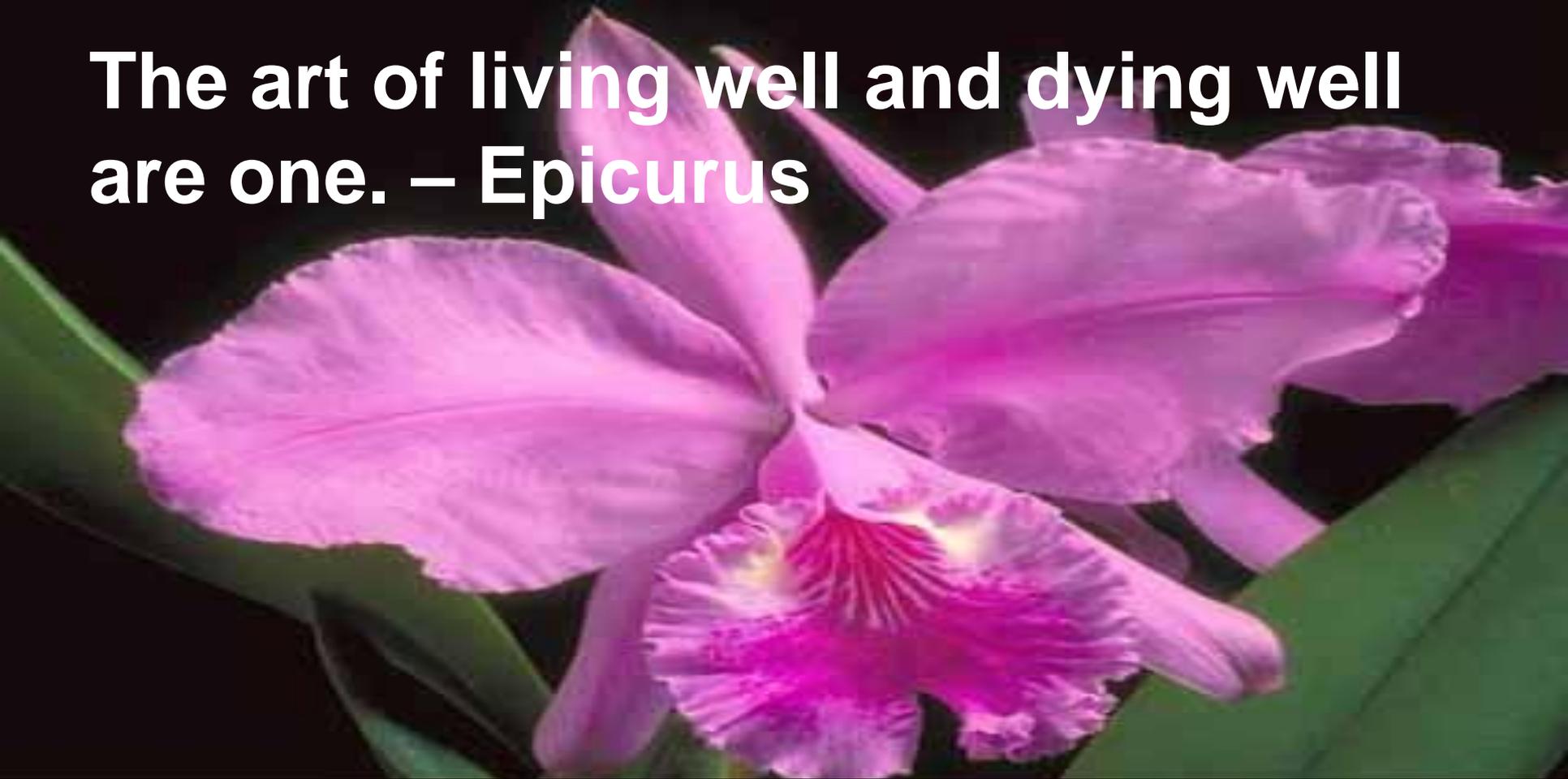
## Quality of Death Is a Concern

Faithful Death

Noble or sacrificial death

Rewarding death

Death in old age

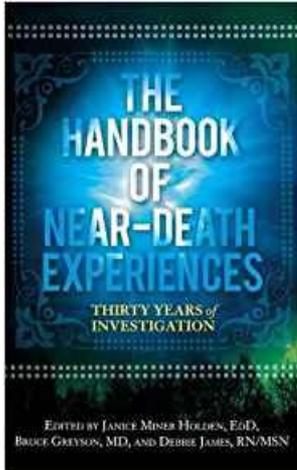


**The art of living well and dying well  
are one. – Epicurus**

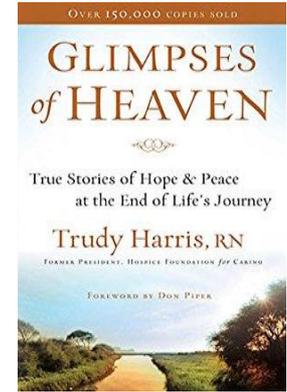


# Successful Death Stories

***Glimpses of Heaven: True Stories of Hope and Peace at the End of Life's Journey***  
By Trudy Harris



***The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation*** by  
Janice Holden, Bruce Greyson, & Debbie James, Editors





# Advanced Directives Resources

<https://www.agingwithdignity.org/>  
Five Wishes



# Legacy Writing

Guides for Writing Your Obituary

<http://www.legacy.com/news/advice-and-support/obituary-writing-tips/1772/>

“Where Life Stories Life On”

Legacy.com

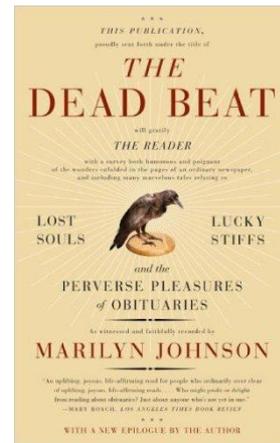
New York State Funeral Directors

<http://nysfda.org/index.php/consumers/preplanning/160-writing-your-own-obituary>

Obituary Kit

<http://www.obitnow.com/obitmain.cfm>

***The Dead Beat: Lost Souls, Lucky Stiffs, and the Perverse Pleasures of Obituaries (P.S.)*** Paperback –by [Marilyn Johnson](#)



# Resources

*Office on Aging and Older Adult Ministries provides a reading list for death preparation. [Here are three must-reads.](#)*

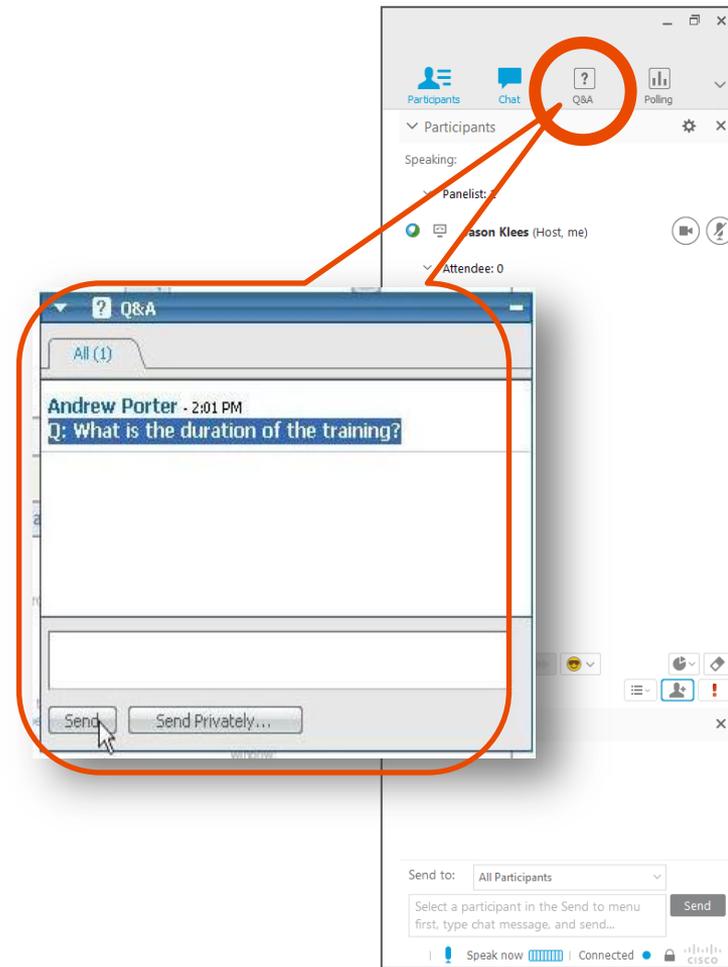
***Being Mortal: Illness, Medicine, and What Matters in the End* by Atul Gawande**

***At the Edge of Life: Conversations When Death Is Near* (Paperback) by Richard L. Morgan**

***Questions of the Spirit: The Quest for Understanding at a Time of Loss* by Brent Green**

# Questions?

Have a question?  
Submit via the Q&A tool.



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