A Good Death:
What Church Leaders Need to Know About Death Preparation for Older Adults
Thanks to Generous Givers

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Rev. Dr. William B. Randolph, 
Office on Aging and Older Adult Ministry

Email: wrandolph@umcdiscipleship.org
615-340-7173 Office Phone
www.umcdiscipleship.org/leadership-resources/older-adults
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

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 persons 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.
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

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Clergy</th>
<th>Laity</th>
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<td>1. Advanced Directives— Living Will, legal will, health care power of attorney, estate planning.</td>
<td>1. Death meet-up groups and death discussion groups</td>
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<td>2. Funeral planning and obituary</td>
<td>2. Grief and bereavement support groups</td>
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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.
“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

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
Before I Die Project—There are a lot of ways the people around us can help improve our lives. We don't bump into every neighbor, so a lot of wisdom never gets passed on, although we do share the same public spaces.
Advanced Directives Resources

https://www.agingwithdignity.org/
Five Wishes
Legacy Writing

Guides for Writing Your Obituary

“Where Life Stories Life On”
Legacy.com

New York State Funeral Directors

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
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.
Rev. Dr. William B. Randolph
Office on Aging and Older Adult Ministry

Email: wrandolph@umcdiscipleship.org
615-340-7173  Office Phone
336-429-7362  Cell Phone

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