

These 5 columns were printed in the parish bulletin in late August and early September of 2010. We have placed them on the parish website for future reference.

End of life issues — not just for the elderly

Who will take care of your children? Do you have a will? “End of life” issues are something we don’t like to think about. For most of us, we think we are too young to worry about those things. For those who are “old enough,” that’s not a topic of consideration for most either. There is always tomorrow to think about it, and you have questions about what it all means. The next few weeks we will touch on concerns to help educate everyone, young and old.

If you were in an accident or became seriously ill and could not communicate your wishes, is there someone in your family who would be able to speak for you? Would that person know if you wanted to be on life support? Would he or she even know who your physician is, what you are being treated for, what medications you are taking, your prior medical history, surgeries, and allergies? These are important for the medical professionals who are providing your care to know.

What is a Living Will and how does it differ from a regular will, or are they the same? What is a DPOA (Durable Power of Attorney); is it the same as a POA (Power of Attorney)? Why do you need both? When the physician asks if you have a DNR, what does he or she mean? Do you need a Trust or a Will and how do you decide? What are the Catholic Church’s views on end of life issues and burial? Is cremation allowed? Does this just pertain to the elderly? Not at all! Please stay tuned for the next several weeks and learn more about these issues that are so important for you and your family members to know.

End of life issues — week 2

Do you have children dependent on you for their support? What would happen to them if something happened to you, or worse, both parents? We don’t really want to think about that, but perhaps this thought from my high school driver’s ed teacher many years ago will help you. We often say (or think) that something can’t happen to me; it will happen to “the other guy.” But guess what – to “the other guy” YOU are “the other guy.”



So, if you have dependent children, have you thought about these things in the event you can no longer earn money or make health or financial decisions?

- 1) If you have life insurance, do you review it periodically to make sure the beneficiaries are up-to-date, and that there will be enough money to cover burial expenses, end-of-life medical costs, and raising your children? If you don’t have any life insurance, how will these expenses be met?
- 2) Do you have a DPOA (Durable Power of Attorney) for healthcare decisions? This document allows you to “authorize someone whom you name to make health care decisions for you in the event you are unable to speak for yourself.”
- 3) How about a POA (Power of Attorney)? The POA authorizes another individual to act on your behalf in financial transactions.
- 4) Or a Living Will? A Living Will is a “written statement of your wishes regarding your medical treatment if you are in a terminal condition. It is only effective if two physicians have determined you are terminally ill.”
- 5) Do you have a will which would spell out who you would want to become your children’s legal guardians and take care of your estate? If not, the state would take over and could possibly pick someone you may not have wanted.

These are just a few simplified topics for you to consider. Tragedies that happen to us are usually not controllable, but how prepared we are to handle the results is up to us.

End of life issues — week 3

In last week's bulletin, we touched upon some topics that families with dependent children should think about and act upon. In essence, these things, except for dependent children, apply to all of us. Here are some other things we will want to discuss with our families, depending upon the circumstances.

- 1) DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) - "A DNR Directive is a signed, dated, and witnessed document that allows an adult to state in advance his/her decision that if his/her heart stops beating or breathing stops, no medical procedure will be undertaken to restart the heart or breathing." (*Kansas Health Ethics, Inc.*)
- 2) File of Life - What medications do you take? Do you have allergies? What is your medical/surgical history? Who is(are) your doctor(s)? Which pharmacy do you use? Do you have your medical papers in this file, which would include the DPOA, DNR, etc.?
- 3) Hospice - What is it? "Hospice programs provide care for patients who are terminally ill (life expectancy of six months or less). Stated another way, the key point in determining hospice involvement is the patient's prognosis (life expectancy), not the diagnosis (underlying illness/disease)." (*Harry Hines Memorial Hospice*)

Two hospices that many people are aware of are Harry Hines Hospice and Good Shepherd Hospice. Good Shepherd Hospice has a grief support group which meets at Catholic Care Center the **2nd and 4th Thursday** of each month from 10:00 to 11:00 am.

End of life issues — week 4

In the prior 3 bulletins, we talked of "taking care of things" if something happens to us. But people who have elderly parents have an added responsibility, and often it happens at a very emotionally draining time.

Does someone know where your parents' legal and medical information is? Have they shared their end-of-life plans with you or another family member? Case in point: after my mother's funeral, in her personal things I found a special pin that she wanted to have buried with her; but, sadly, it was too late.

What about funeral and burial plans? One of our sets of parents had pre-arranged much, including the tombstone, which they had designed. The other had a burial plot and that was all. It was then left to the executor to secure the tombstone with the necessary approval of the "committee" of siblings.

Do you know the Church's teaching on funeral rites and cremation? Space does not allow a full discussion of this topic, but there are various reliable sources available.

None of this is easy to address. But by doing a little work ahead of time, we can make the tough, emotional times a little easier to get through.

End of life issues — week 5 (the final chapter)

In prior bulletins we touched upon a number of topics that people need to concern themselves with, no matter what ages, no matter if there are dependent children. As you can imagine, a wealth of information is available to help you, and maybe even overwhelm you. This week I will provide resources I used and which you can use to help with any planning you must do.

Via Christi Regional Medical Center booklet “To Help You Decide” (Contains a Living Will and a Durable Power of Attorney for Healthcare Decisions)

Catholic Funeral Rites: The Body and Creation (A short pastoral guide about the Church’s preferences regarding the dignity of the body after death) by Bishop Eugene Gerber, Bishop Emeritus, Diocese of Wichita)

Kansas Health Ethics, Inc. (www.kansashealthethics.org)

Harry Hynes Memorial Hospice

<http://www.hynesmemorial.org/>

Good Shepherd Hospice (Bereavement Coordinator Sharlene 616-2277)

Various Catholic websites

The Media Center in the church Gathering Space and other pamphlets in Stewardship Hall.