

End of life Decisions

Goals:

To be more conversant with issues/concerns around end-of-life including developing this as a ministry focus within parish life

Importance of thinking, praying, and reflecting on one's own wishes and surrogate decision-makers in light of Orthodox Faith.

How parish faithful can support those at end-of-life

Presenters:

Fr. George Gray

Fr. Ken Stavrevsky

Fr. Steven Voytovich

Some of the realities of aging and end of life

Income falls 50% upon retirement

Of 80-85 age group, 30% in extended care facilities (ECF)

20% of men over age 65 are working

40% of internists' time is spent with the elderly

New Haven CT has more nursing home than hospital beds

80% of population likely to die in ECF

More grandparents are taking an active role in raising grandchildren

Highest risk of suicide is elderly white male

Most rapidly increasing population segment is elderly

1974 first postgrad training program in care of the elderly

1988 first board exam for geriatric care

50% of those older than 65 with complications due to terminal illness have reported completing advance directives.

For patients who experience cardiac arrest not caused by simple cardiac conditions, likelihood of success and return to function is low (7-10%). Of these survivors, more than 40% will experience complications due to resuscitation: pneumonia, congestive heart failure, gastrointestinal hemorrhage, seizures, and others.

With technology far beyond our ability to know when and how to use it, we need to prayerfully reflect on the importance of our Orthodox Faith in responding to today's healthcare environment.

Time to discuss our wishes and concerns is now, before we are in an ICU, intubated, and possibly unconscious. Role of advance care planning, and some myths regarding advance directives.

While the above concerns are important, supporting those at end of life very important ministry.

Concentric circles of support

Example of cancer center support group

Palliative care has come a long way, law of double effect important to know.

Hospice care

Traumatic death

Sudden/tragic death

Other kinds of “death”: divorce, loss of limb, independence, etc.

Glimpses of life

Luke 16:19

Augustine’s Confessions

C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

Grief as process

Understanding is changing, greater openness

Grief as a journey, complicated grief

Sacramental Ministry to those near the end of life

Confession and Communion

Holy Unction

The Ministry of Those Who Suffer, M.Div. Thesis (Voytovich)

C.S. Lewis The Problem of Pain

Three operations of pain:

Shatters the illusion that all is well

Shatters the illusion that what we have (good or bad) is our own and enough for us.

Involves our choice in suffering.

Those who are suffering, through support and faith, can work through unresolved issues, kenotically place their lives and illness in God’s hands, and glimpse redemption in the midst of their suffering. These witnesses become transfigured into missionary beacons of the reality of life and death that many around them can gain from. The image here is like a ripple in the pool.

Some examples

Grief/mourning Worksheet

Questions and discussion

The Rev. Steven Voytovich, D.Min.

St. Vladimir’s Seminary Faith in Action Parish Ministries Conference

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