

Faith at the Threshold:

A Toolkit for
End-of-Life Ministry

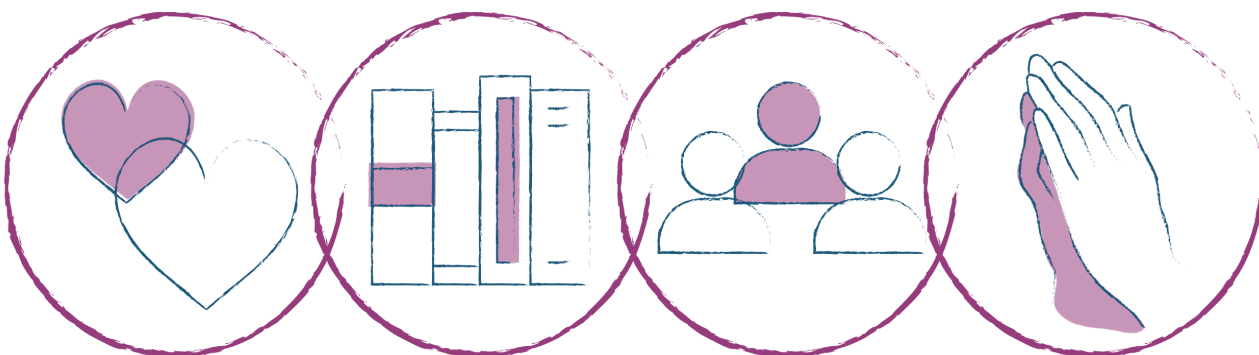


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Compassion & Choices envisions a society that affirms life and accepts the inevitability of death, embraces expanded options for compassionate dying, and empowers everyone to choose end-of-life care that reflects their values, priorities, and beliefs.

Introduction

[Compassion & Choices](#) is the nation's oldest and largest nonprofit organization working to improve care, expand options, and empower everyone to chart their end-of-life journey.

Faith leaders — including ordained clergy, lay leaders, and community organizers — have long been essential partners in this mission. As trusted guides, they are uniquely equipped to help individuals and families prepare for and navigate the end of life.

At their best, faith communities provide a natural environment to explore life's biggest questions, whether during a service, over a shared meal, or through one-on-one spiritual care.

Faith at the Threshold was designed by Compassion & Choices to help faith leaders bring meaningful discussions and resources about mortality, legacy, and care into their communities.

This toolkit was developed by leaders from Christian backgrounds but the ideas and resources it offers can be used in a variety of religious traditions and communal settings.

Through this resource, and our [other toolkits and guides](#), we hope to empower everyone to prepare for the future.

If you are not in a formal leadership position but would like to bring these conversations to your community, we encourage you to discuss your ideas with your faith leaders and invite them to collaborate with you on this effort.

This toolkit is also just a starting place! While we hope you find many of the ideas and resources shared here helpful, we encourage you to build upon them to create your own programming that meets the needs of your community.

If you are interested in organizing an event in your faith community related to end-of-life care, planning, and options, [you can make a copy of this sample survey](#). Use it to assess your community's needs and determine which topics and types of events will interest them.

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Hosting an Educational Event



“*Our ultimate goal, after all, is not a good death, but a good life to the very end.*

– Atul Gawande, “Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End”

Educational events are a structured way to provide community members with practical knowledge, theological and spiritual insights, and resources for end-of-life planning and care. These events can help demystify complex topics while offering space for reflection and communal learning.

This section outlines a range of educational event ideas, including workshops, hosting guest speakers, interactive activities, and book clubs. Each suggestion includes step-by-step guidance to ensure that you can easily implement these programs and tailor them to meet your community’s needs.

End-of-Life Care and Options 101 Workshop

Candid conversations are crucial to ensuring we get the care we want at the end of life, so it’s important to understand our options and discuss our priorities with loved ones, healthcare providers, and faith leaders. This educational workshop can focus on understanding different end-of-life care options, such as [palliative care](#), [hospice](#), [voluntary stopping eating and drinking \(VSED\)](#), and [medical aid in dying](#) (read more about these options in the Glossary on page 32).

- > **Research Your Options:** Consider what end-of-life options you want to focus on during this event given your location and your community’s ethical and religious convictions. For instance, [medical aid in dying is only available in certain states](#).
- > **Find Your Facilitator:** Find a member of your community or congregation who is able to facilitate this event. If no one is available, partner with a local death doula, hospice social worker, medical professional, or other expert.

- > **Host a Panel Discussion:** Invite a hospice nurse, a faith leader in your community, a chaplain, a healthcare provider, or others to share their wisdom and perspectives on end-of-life options.
- > **Breakout Groups:** Facilitate small group discussions where attendees can reflect on what they learned and ask questions.
- > **Share Resources:** Provide attendees with a list of resources and referrals to local and national organizations that can offer additional support and information.

End-of-Life Planning 101 Workshop

Planning ahead is an act of love for ourselves and the people in our life. This interactive workshop can provide an introduction to the basics of creating wills, trusts, advance healthcare directives, and designating a power of attorney. This can be a one-off event or part of a series, where you focus on different elements of end-of-life planning throughout the year or over a set amount of time.

- > **Find Your Facilitator:** Find a member of your community of congregation who is informed on these topics and able to facilitate this event. If no one is available, find a local death doula, hospice social worker, medical professional, legal professional, or estate planner to partner with.
- > **Provide Materials:** Share resources such as sample documents, checklists, or guides, and provide hard copies and pens if needed. Compassion & Choices has a [FreeWill tool](#), which you can use to create a will online for free in just 20 minutes; an [estate planning resources](#); and an [End of Life Decisions Guide](#), available for digital [download](#) or free hard copies can be ordered [here](#).
- > **Advance Care Planning:** Begin with a brief presentation on what advance care planning entails and why it's important. Discuss any religious or theological considerations, including your faith tradition's views on funerals, burial, cremation, and rituals. For example, Cheryl Tyiska, a Catholic doula and cemetarian, encourages people to explore which rituals might be facilitated by clergy and which can be done by congregants or loved ones.
- > **Interactive Component:** Walk attendees through one part of the process, such as creating an [advance directive](#), in real-time. In many states, completing an advance directive or assigning a healthcare proxy can be done in just a couple of hours with

the signature of one or two witnesses. Note that some things, like declining or stopping life-sustaining treatment, can be included in your directive; others, like VSED and medical aid in dying, will depend on your location and circumstances in the dying period.

- > **Discussion:** Allow ample time for Q&A to address participants' specific concerns. Identify areas of interest for future events.
- > **Share Resources:** Provide attendees with a list of resources and referrals to local and national organizations that can offer further support and information.

Financial Planning for the End-of-Life

Financial planning is a crucial but often overlooked aspect of preparing for the end of life. Many individuals and families struggle to navigate estate planning, medical expenses, funeral costs, and legacy giving. Through this workshop, communities can help individuals approach these topics with greater confidence — ensuring that their financial and personal wishes are honored while reducing potential future challenges for their loved ones. This workshop could also include themes of leaving a legacy and how that relates to one's faith and values.

- > **Find Your Facilitator:** Partner with financial planners, local lawyers, or a doula who specializes in estate planning and wills, to offer guidance on preparing financially for the end of life — including managing finances and medical expenses, estate planning, and creating a will. There are also free resources that take you through the process of creating a will, like [FreeWill](#).
- > **Decide on the Format:** Aim for 90 – 120 minutes so that you have time for discussion and Q&A. Dedicate 10 minutes to welcome participants, introduce any guest speakers, and offer a prayer or meditation. Next, offer a brief introduction to why financial planning is an act of love and care for oneself and one's loved ones, and then move into the presentation or workshop. Topics to cover might include:
 - Wills and trusts: What they are and why they matter
 - Advance healthcare directives and powers of attorney
 - Managing medical expenses and long-term care planning
 - Funeral and burial cost considerations
 - Charitable giving and legacy planning

- > **Breakout Groups:** Facilitate small groups where attendees can reflect on discussion prompts, such as:
 - What financial preparations have you already made?
 - What challenges or concerns do you have?
 - How does your faith and values shape your approach to financial planning and leaving a legacy?
- > **Share Resources:** Provide attendees with a list of local and national organizations who can offer further support.

Funeral Planning Guidance Workshop

Funerals and memorial services provide opportunities to gather as a community to grieve, reflect, and celebrate a loved one's life. Making these arrangements ahead of time can ensure that services reflect one's wishes and values, minimize costs, and alleviate potential stress for loved ones. This workshop can provide resources and guidance for navigating this process.

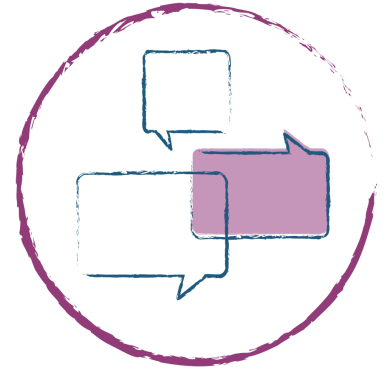
- > **Educational Segment:** Present an overview of the key elements of funeral planning, including burial options, costs, and personalizing ceremonies. Consider the range of funerary and disposition options, including traditional burial in a cemetery, cremation, or alternatives like green burial. Share resources related to these options and a list of providers in your community.
- > **Interactive Activity:** Use worksheets to help attendees outline their funeral preferences. For participants who want to be buried, ask them to think about the clothing they might want to be buried in or any significant items they would like to be buried with.
- > **Guest Speaker:** Invite a funeral director, cemeterian, or faith leader to discuss practical and spiritual considerations.
- > **Discussion:** Allow ample time for Q&A to address participants' specific concerns.

Introduction to Dementia Workshop

One in three Americans will be diagnosed with dementia, a general term that describes the progressive loss of language and other skills severe enough to interfere with daily life.

This educational session can provide basic information about dementia, what to expect, and resources for individuals facing dementia and their caregivers.

- > **Invite a Specialist:** Host a guest speaker or a local geriatrician or dementia care expert who can explain what dementia is, common symptoms and challenges, and how it can impact people and their daily lives.
- > **Interactive Element:** Share and guide participants through a few questions in the [Compassion & Choices Dementia Values & Priorities Tool](#), designed to help someone document their care wishes in the event they are diagnosed with dementia in the future. After answering a series of questions related to the changes commonly seen in the progression of dementia, the tool provides a document that can be added to an existing advance directive and shared with others.
- > **Faith Integration:** Reflect on how to offer spiritual care and community support for individuals with dementia and their loved ones and caregivers.
- > **Discussion:** Allow ample time for Q&A to address participants' specific concerns. Identify further needs and areas of interest for potential future events.
- > **Share Resources:** Provide attendees with a list of resources and referrals to local and national organizations that can offer further support and information.



Hosting a Social Event

“*The acceptance of death is not denial of its pain or of the fact that it is unbearable. Instead, it is an attempt to include it in the rhythm of created life.*

– Dorothee Sölle, “The Mystery of Death”

Events like a [Death Over Dinner](#) party, a Death Café, or game night using the [Death Deck Game](#) are designed to be informal, engaging, and even fun — making it easier to approach topics that might otherwise feel daunting. By hosting these events, faith leaders can normalize and encourage conversations about death and foster community.

This section outlines ideas, resources, and step-by-step instructions for hosting end-of-life-focused social events. Each idea can be adapted to fit the unique needs and interests of your community.

Death Over Dinner

Host a [Death Over Dinner](#) party where participants gather to share a meal and discuss end-of-life topics in a relaxed setting. Shared meals are already a meaningful part of faith communities; across many religious traditions, breaking bread together symbolizes unity, tradition, and shared history. That makes Death Over Dinner a great event to complement existing rituals and traditions.

- **Invite Guests:** Send out invitations to members of your community. Aim for 6-10 participants to keep the gathering intimate. Use your community’s meeting space, a local restaurant, or a member’s home.
 - Prepare Discussion Prompts: Visit the [Death Over Dinner website](#) (deathoverdinner.org) for curated prompts, or create your own questions, such as:

- What music do you want to play at your funeral?
 - What favorite smells do you always want to remember?
 - Do you have a favorite quote you want to be remembered by?
 - What do you want your legacy to be?
 - What kind of care would you like at the end of your life?
 - What would your dream funeral be like?
- > **Set the Scene:** Create a welcoming space with comfortable seating, and invite people to bring a dish made using a recipe from a loved one who has passed, a culturally significant food, or simply one of their favorite snacks. Consider opening with a prayer or reflection to set the tone.
 - > **Debrief:** End the dinner with a group reflection on what participants learned or found meaningful through the experience.

Death Café

Death Cafés are casual events where people gather over refreshments and dessert to discuss mortality in an open, agenda-free conversation.

- > **Find a Location:** Use your community's meeting space, a local coffee shop or restaurant, or a member's home.
- > **Advertise:** Share the event details widely, emphasizing that it's not a grief support group but a space to discuss death openly.
- > **Provide Refreshments:** Offer tea, coffee, and light snacks.
- > **Open the Floor:** Use a general introduction like, "What brought you here today?" to start the conversation. Allow discussions to flow naturally without a set agenda.

Death Deck Game Night

Use [The Death Deck](#), a lively party game designed to spark conversations about death and dying, as the centerpiece for a social event.

- > **Find a Location:** Use your community's gathering space or a member's home.
- > **Gather Supplies:** Purchase or borrow The Death Deck, set out snacks and refreshments, and play fun music to set the atmosphere.

- > **Create Groups:** Divide participants into small groups to make the game more intimate and engaging.
- > **Facilitate:** Explain the rules and provide guidance if needed. Use the cards to prompt discussions and share personal stories.
- > **Debrief:** End the event with a group reflection on what participants learned or found meaningful.

Legacy Project Workshop

Help participants begin documenting their life stories, values, and wishes in a tangible format to leave for loved ones or their community.

- > **Choose a Format:** Offer options like journaling, video recording, or scrapbooking.
- > **Provide Guidance:** Share prompts for reflection, such as:
 - What are the most important lessons you've learned in your life?
 - What do you hope future generations will remember about you?
 - What elements of your faith, spiritual practices, or values do you hope to pass on to your loved ones?
- > **Offer Materials:** Provide journals, art supplies, or recording equipment as needed. Invite participants to bring their own materials or photos they would like to use.
- > **Create a Sharing Space:** Allow participants to share excerpts or reflections as they feel comfortable.

Movie Screening and Discussion

Screen a film that explores themes of mortality, legacy, or caregiving, followed by a facilitated discussion. Choose films that offer diverse perspectives on death, grief, and legacy while highlighting relevant cultural, spiritual, and ethical dimensions.

- > **Select a Film:** Choose a film like “The Farewell” or “Departures,” or documentaries that deal with the realities of death and end-of-life options, like “How to Die in Oregon,” which explores medical aid in dying, or “A Will for the Woods,” an award-winning environmental documentary about the green burial movement. For family-friendly programming, screen movies like “Coco” or “Up.”

- > **Set Up:** Arrange seating, set up a projector, and provide snacks to create a cozy atmosphere.
- > **Facilitate Discussion:** Use questions like, “What resonated with you about this story?” or “How did the film’s portrayal of death align with your own beliefs?” to get the conversation going. If the movie deals with particular themes, like end-of-life options, funerals, or disposition, provide relevant resources for people to review at the event or to take home with them.

Bucket List Brainstorming Party

Invite participants to dream big by creating a “bucket list” of things they want to accomplish in their lifetime. Explore if and how your faith community can support these goals. If there are commonalities, can your community plan a trip, host a party, or fundraise to help individuals cross something off their list?

- > **Provide Materials:** Offer worksheets, colorful markers, magazines to make collages, or a large communal poster board.
- > **Facilitate Sharing:** Encourage participants to share one or two items from their list with the group.
- > **Reflect:** End with a discussion on how these goals align with their values and priorities, and steps they can take to start crossing some of the items off their list!



Preaching a Sermon

“*The preacher is never under obligation to preach a great sermon but they are always under obligation to wrestle with a great idea.*

– Howard Thurman, “The Growing Edge”

Sermon preparation is a deeply personal process that invites reflection, prayer, and discernment in order to share messages that resonate with one’s community. Created for Christian clergy, the sermon prompts in this section are offered as opportunities for reflection on the topic of advanced care planning, with the understanding that each leader’s approach to preaching will be unique.

These prompts and suggestions are not prescriptive; rather, they are designed to inspire you to engage your spiritual imagination and interpret these themes in a manner that aligns with your personal experiences and ministry context. If it is helpful to see how other faith leaders have addressed these topics, you can view a message from Rev. Dr. Shockley, titled “Talking About Death Won’t Kill You,” [here](#), and additional sermons [here](#).

As you explore this guide, may you find the words that speak to your spirit – inviting you to preach sermons and lead advanced care planning conversations with authenticity, compassion, and a deep love for those you serve.

Guiding Questions for Sermon Preparation

- > In the days leading up to his crucifixion, Christ shared profound reflections and teachings with his disciples. What can we learn from his example about discussing our own legacy and end-of-life wishes with loved ones?
- > What does it mean to live our legacy intentionally? How can our end-of-life preferences shape how we live today?

- > Why do we often avoid talking about death and dying, even though death, resurrection, and the hope of eternal life are central themes in the Christian faith? How can we shift our perspectives to see these conversations as opportunities for love and compassion?
- > How can sharing our end-of-life preferences be an act of love for our family and friends? In what ways can it enhance our relationships and decrease anxiety in critical moments?
- > What kind of legacy do we want to leave behind? How does discussing our values and wishes contribute to that legacy, not just for ourselves but for those we love?
- > What simple but meaningful actions can we take this week to begin these conversations with our loved ones? How can we start creating a culture of openness around these important topics?
- > As a community of faith, how can we support each other in having these difficult but necessary conversations? What resources are available, and how can we become models for one another in this journey?
- > Have you had a meaningful conversation about end-of-life planning with someone you love? What did that experience teach you, and how did it change your outlook on faith, life, and relationships?

Communion Connection

The Last Supper — with its symbols of remembrance and connection — can encourage congregations to explore their own relationships with life, death, and legacy.

Consider reflecting on these questions in your sermon about the Last Supper:

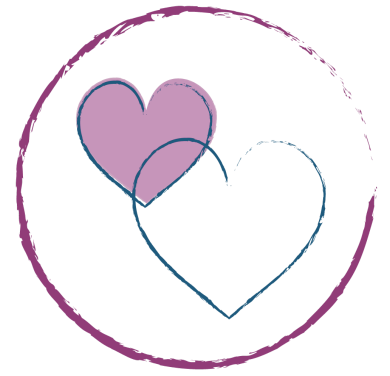
- > How can the symbols of communion inspire us to think about our values and wishes at the end of life?
- > How can we, like Jesus, create spaces of love and support that invite honest discussions about death — without fear or stigma?
- > How can we use the command “Do this in remembrance of me” as an invitation into a conversation about our final wishes?

Reflecting on these questions can help transform the conversation around advance care planning into an act of love, honoring both life and the profound connections we cherish.

Digging Deeper into Medical Aid in Dying

While the topic of medical aid in dying is not mentioned in the Bible, there are scriptural passages that may offer comfort to those grappling with this deeply personal decision. As faith leaders, it is essential to approach this subject with sensitivity and discernment, carefully considering the biblical witness while acknowledging the complexities and deep emotions involved.

[In this brief video](#), Rev. Dr. Madison Shockley thoughtfully utilizes the example of Saul's death in 1 Samuel 31:1-4, 8-10 to reflect on medical aid in dying. In this narrative, we see the intertwining of suffering, choice, and the pursuit of peace in a time of deep crisis. By reflecting on such stories, faith leaders can guide their congregations through conversations about medical aid in dying with compassion, empathy, and a grounding in scripture, helping individuals navigate their choices in light of their faith and values.



Offering One-on-One Counseling

“ *To receive spiritual help in time of need requires, first of all, not to deny but to affirm the search... Seek the companionship of others who will befriend you and listen as you live the questions of your life.*

– Henri J.M. Nouwen, “Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith”

Counseling, spiritual direction, and spiritual care are meaningful forms of support that faith leaders can provide to their communities. These one-on-one conversations allow individuals to honestly share, reflect, process, and receive emotional and spiritual encouragement. This can be especially helpful when people are grieving; facing hardship like a new diagnosis or illness; or considering their end-of-life options, such as hospice care or medical aid in dying (where [available](#)).

We recommend that these sessions be facilitated by faith leaders who have received appropriate training and have prior experience in counseling, spiritual direction, or chaplaincy. That said, some foundational principles include ensuring confidentiality, practicing active listening and empathy, and respecting the individual's autonomy and identity – including their spiritual orientation and beliefs.

Here are some ideas for how you can offer counseling to your community:

- Have set times each week that faith leaders are available for sessions. These could be drop-in style, or you could encourage people to call or email ahead to reserve a time slot.
- Inform your community that this service is available, the times that sessions will be offered, and if there is a fee. You can share this announcement in services, in a newsletter or on a website, on a bulletin board, and through other channels.

- > If you are aware that a member of your community is grieving, caring for a loved one, or facing illness or another hardship, you could proactively reach out to them and remind them that support is available.
- > Compile a list of other faith leaders or spiritual directors in your community to whom you can refer people.

Remember that supporting others, especially through grief and hardship, can be taxing. Prioritize your well-being by setting appropriate boundaries; maintaining your own care routine and spiritual practices; seeking out support from loved ones, professionals, or peers; and taking time to rest.



Facilitating a Support Circle

“*Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation.
Healing is an act of communion.*

– bell hooks, “All About Love: New Visions”

Support circles bring people together to share life’s highs and lows, offering connection and mutual support while strengthening community ties.

We recommend hosting support circles on a biweekly basis. However, groups focusing on acute grief or crisis support may benefit from more frequent meetings at first before transitioning to meeting biweekly or monthly. Support circles can meet for a fixed time, such as four to six sessions, or on an ongoing basis if there is an interest or need. Consult with your community members about their preferred meeting frequency and duration.

Below are ideas for different types of support circles, a sample meeting outline, and prompts for discussion or reflection. Suggested group norms can be found in the Appendix on page 31.

Ideas for Support Circles

Support circles can be created to address a variety of needs and interests, and can be customized to best serve your community. Here are three ideas to get started:

- **Grief and Loss:** Provide a space for people to share their experiences with grief, loss, death, and dying. Grief and loss groups can help participants reflect on and navigate the emotional and spiritual elements of their experiences. The group can offer encouragement, explore responses and tools to process loss, discuss the different stages of grief, engage in creative practices, and share resources and ideas for accessing additional support.

- > **Caregiving:** Allow people to process their experience of caregiving and receive emotional and spiritual encouragement. The group can explore balancing self-care with caring for others, discuss how to manage and prevent burnout, celebrate and honor caregiving as a sacred act, and engage in restorative rituals and exercises.
- > **End-of-Life Options:** Create an opportunity for people to reflect on their hopes and fears for their end-of-life experience; learn about different end-of-life options (life-sustaining treatments, hospice care, medical aid in dying, etc.); and discern which options best align with their values, priorities, and theological beliefs. To help facilitate these conversations and start documenting one's wishes, your group can use Compassion & Choices' [End-of-Life Decisions Guide and Toolkit](#) which is available for digital [download](#). Free hard copies can be ordered [here](#).

Sample Meeting Outline

- > **Opening** (10 minutes): Welcome and introductions. Explain the topic for the meeting and a reminder of the group norms. You can also share a prayer, meditation, reading, or moment of silence to ground the group and set the tone.
- > **Check-in** (15-20 minutes): Invite attendees to share how they're feeling and what brought them to the group today.
- > **Discussion and activities** (30-45 minutes): Have a group facilitator guide the discussion. You can also incorporate group activities such as reflective journaling, creating art, meditation, or using a video or reading as a prompt for discussion.
- > **Closing** (10-15 minutes): Invite everyone to share one takeaway, insight, or reflection from the session. Facilitators can also reflect back what was heard or observed during the time together. Share resources for further exploration, a note about the next meeting, and any other announcements. To close, offer a prayer, blessing, brief reading, or moment of silence.

Prompts for Discussion or Reflection

- > What are your beliefs about what happens after death? How do those beliefs make you feel? In what ways do they bring comfort and peace, or challenge you?
- > Can you share a story or memory about a loved one who has died? How do you continue to experience them or their legacy in your life today?

- > If you could write a letter to someone who has died or a person you care for, what would you say?
- > What has your experience with grief been like? What have you learned from it? How have you experienced the divine amidst it?
- > What has your experience of caregiving been like? What lessons has it taught you?
- > How does your faith speak to you and your experience in this season of life? What teachings, sacred texts, or practices have been supportive to you?
- > What hopes and desires do you have for your end-of-life experience? What fears or concerns do you have?
- > Who do you want to be involved in your end-of-life care?
- > What spiritual practices do you want to incorporate into your end-of-life care?



Organizing a Study Group

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*You keep track of all my sorrows.
You have collected all my tears in your bottle.
You have recorded each one in your book.*

– Psalm 56:8

A study group provides the opportunity for faith communities to explore how sacred texts, theologies, and spiritual practices inform various understandings of grief, death, and dying. Study groups can equally foster engagement with contemporary social and cultural ideas about the end of life. Whether through a book club, scriptural study, or theological study, this programming offers a space for meaningful learning and reflection.

Certain seasons and holy days can also provide scaffolding for end-of-life study, planning, and reflection, so consider organizing your programming around such times — like Lent or Advent in the Christian tradition.

Below are steps to help you organize a study group focused on end-of-life themes, including book recommendations, suggested meeting outlines, and discussion prompts. Suggested group norms can be found in the Appendix on page 31.

Step 1: Define the Focus and Format

- > Decide whether your study group will use a book or sacred text, or if it will be a thematic discussion and what the theme will be, such as death, the afterlife, grief, or end-of-life planning and preparation.
- > Determine the meeting time and length of the study, e.g., a four-week series, ongoing monthly meetings, or during a special period in the liturgical calendar.
- > Choose a meeting format: in-person, virtual, or hybrid.

Step 2: Select a Passage, Book, or Resource

Consult with your congregation's leadership team to identify which resource(s) to engage with, or simply revisit sacred texts with an eye for themes that connect to grief, death, and dying. If appropriate and exciting to your community, consider selecting books or resources from different religious and theological traditions, as well as trade books that deal with end-of-life issues and themes.

While not an exhaustive list, some suggestions include:

> **Biblical Passages:**

- 2 Samuel 18, King David mourning his son Absalom
- The Psalms, such as Psalm 23, 34, or 147
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-4, "There is a time for everything..."
- Matthew 5:4, "Blessed are those who mourn..."
- Matthew 14:13-14, Jesus mourns John the Baptist
- Luke 2:25-35, Simeon's prophecy and response upon seeing Jesus
- John 11, Jesus weeping for Lazarus
- Romans 12:15, mourning with those who mourn
- Romans 14:7-9, belonging to Christ through life and death
- 1 Corinthians 15, teaching on the death and resurrection

> **Spiritual Memoirs and Guidance:**

- "[A Grief Observed: Readers' Edition](#)" by C.S. Lewis. The acclaimed Christian author and lay theologian wrestles emotionally and spiritually with the loss of his wife to cancer, offering solace and insight to others facing grief.
- "[Living Well and Dying Faithfully: Christian Practices for End-of-Life Care](#)" edited by John Swinton and Richard Payne. This text addresses how faith and medicine together can enhance the well-being of those who are dying.

- [“The Gift of Years: Growing Older Gracefully”](#) by Joan Chittister. A Benedictine nun and leading theologian explores the many facets of aging and offers a spiritual perspective on it. Find discussion questions [here](#).
- [“Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring”](#) by Henri J. M. Nouwen. The prolific spiritual writer shares his experiences with aging, loss, grief, and fear, and reflects on the idea of befriending death.
- [“The Gift of Peace: Personal Reflections”](#) by Joseph Cardinal Bernardin. This memoir follows the Cardinal's spiritual journey at the end of his life, including his cancer diagnosis and decision to discontinue chemotherapy.
- [“Caravan of No Despair: A Memoir of Loss and Transformation”](#) by Mirabai Starr. An expert in contemplative practice and a certified bereavement counselor shares her journey following the sudden death of her daughter.
- [“No Death, No Fear: Comforting Wisdom for Life”](#) by Thich Nhat Hanh. An acclaimed Buddhist monk and teacher examines death, fear, and the nature of existence through Zen parables, guided meditations, and personal stories.
- [“Sacred Dying: Creating Rituals for Embracing the End of Life”](#) by Dr. Megory Anderson. A theologian and liturgist shares rituals, poems, prayers, and music that can help people who are in the process of dying.
- [“Being with Dying: Cultivating Compassion and Fearlessness in the Presence of Death”](#) by Joan Halifax. Drawing on her experience caring for the dying, a Buddhist teacher provides lessons and insight for facing death.
- [“Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End”](#) by Atul Gawande. Though not explicitly religious, this best-selling book, written by a surgeon, raises profound ethical and spiritual questions about end-of-life care.

Additional resources to consider can be found in the “Creating a Resource Hub” section below.

Step 3: Structure the Meetings

Each meeting should include time for an opening prayer, meditation, or check-in before moving into discussion and reflection. Below is a sample structure:

1. Opening Reflection (5-10 minutes)

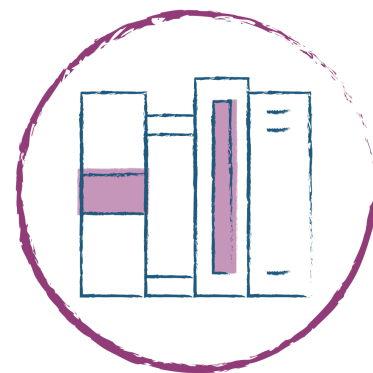
- Begin with a prayer, meditation, or moment of silence.
- Read a short passage from scripture or the selected text.

2. Discussion (30-45 minutes)

- Use guiding questions to facilitate conversation. Examples include:
 - > How does this text shape our understanding of death and dying?
 - > What insights from this text resonate with you?
 - > How does this text relate to your experiences with grief and loss?
 - > What wisdom does this text offer our community as we work to support those who are grieving or facing the end of life?

3. Closing Reflection (5-10 minutes)

- Offer space for final thoughts or personal reflections.
- End with a blessing, prayer, or shared moment of gratitude.



Creating a Resource Hub

“

*I see life as a shared gift, received from others
and passed on to others, and living and dying as one process,
in which lies both our suffering and our reward.*

– Ursula K. Le Guin

Many individuals and families seek resources to navigate grief, loss, and planning for the end of life, yet finding trusted, accessible materials can be challenging.

A resource hub can serve as a central place for community members to access valuable information. Whether hosted physically in your community’s worship or gathering space, or digitally on a website, creating a hub ensures that people can find helpful resources on advance directives, palliative care, ethical decision-making, grief support, and more.

This guide will help you build and maintain your resource hub. A list of suggested materials to include in your hub is also provided. This is by no means an all-inclusive list, but rather a guide of recommended resources to help you get started. Your hub should be tailored to meet your community’s specific interests and needs.

Building a Physical Resource Hub

If your community has a gathering space, creating a physical resource hub can be a helpful way to share hard copies of books and other resources. Here’s how to set it up:

- **Create a Space:** Choose a visible, accessible location such as an office, library, or a dedicated bookshelf in a community hall to house your resource hub. If possible, make it a comfortable area with seating to encourage quiet reading and reflection. Consider including a guestbook for visitors to leave reflections or requests for additional resources.

- > **Organize Resources by Topic:** Use labeled sections such as “Advance Care Planning,” “Grief & Healing,” and “Memoirs” to easily help people find resources.
- > **Provide a Borrowing System:** Implement a sign-out sheet or digital tracking tool and place return date reminders on materials to encourage circulation.
- > **Promote Awareness:** Announce the hub during services and through other communications, like newsletters. You can reference the hub in services or group discussions to remind the community that it is available.
- > **Maintain and Refresh:** Regularly review and update materials to keep the collection relevant. Accept recommendations from members for new resources.

Creating a Digital Resource Hub

Having a digital resource hub is a great way to share online resources with your community and ensure they are accessible to all members. Here’s how you can set one up:

- > **Select a Hosting Platform:** Use your faith community’s website, a shared [Google Drive](#), or a dedicated online resource page.
- > **Structure the Content Effectively:** Categorize resources into sections such as “Spiritual Support,” “Practical Planning,” and “Grief & Healing.” Provide direct download links for pamphlets, articles, and guides.
- > **Ensure Accessibility:** Provide multilingual options when possible and use clear, large text and intuitive navigation for ease of use.
- > **Encourage Engagement:** Include a form or contact information so that congregants can suggest new materials or share their experiences with the resources. You could also consider featuring testimonials from community members about how the resources have helped them.
- > **Update It:** Review and add new resources periodically. You can also rotate featured content based on seasonal topics, such as grief support during holidays.

Suggested Materials

A strong resource hub includes a diverse range of materials to support faith communities in discussing and navigating end-of-life planning, grief, spiritual care, and related topics.

Consider including any of the resources listed in the “Organizing a Study Group” section above. Here are some additional ideas of materials to include:

Guides

- > [Compassion & Choices End-of-Life Planning Guide](#): A comprehensive and practical guide for planning for future healthcare decisions and the end of life.
- > [The Conversation Project](#): Offers helpful practical guides on having difficult conversations around aging and healthcare decisions.
- > [Advance Directives by state](#): Caringinfo.org offers resources on finding your state-specific advance directive guidelines.
- > [Compassion & Choices Dementia Values & Priorities Tool](#): An interactive tool for documenting wishes regarding healthcare in the case of a dementia diagnosis, with which you can create an addendum to an existing advance directive.
- > [End-of-Life Planning Resources in Spanish](#): Various resources available in Spanish.
- > Find additional resources [here](#).

Books

- > [“The Art of Dying Well: A Practical Guide to a Good End of Life”](#) by Katy Butler. Based on a journalist’s experience with caregiving and hundreds of interviews, this book is a guide for living well for as long as possible and adapting to change.
- > [“The Cure for Sorrow: A Book of Blessings for Times of Grief”](#) by Jan Richardson. An artist, writer, and ordained Methodist minister offers a collection of blessings written in the wake of her husband’s sudden death.
- > [“Briefly Perfectly Human: Making an Authentic Life by Getting Real About the End”](#) by Alua Arthur. A leading death doula’s memoir reframes how we think about death and shares how connecting with our mortality can help us lead more fulfilling lives.
- > [“The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully”](#) by Frank Ostaseski. A Buddhist teacher and cofounder of the Zen Hospice Project explores how maintaining a consciousness of death can help awaken us to our lives.

- > ["Visiting Hours Are Over: A chaplain discovers what really matters from her parents' deaths"](#) by Janna Flynn Roche. A chaplain's journey supporting her parents at the end of their lives, with wisdom and practical guidance shared along the way.
- > ["Broken Heart, Shared Heart, Healing Heart: Navigating the Loss of Your Pet"](#) by Barbara Allen. A minister shares insights from different religious and spiritual traditions and offers compassionate guidance for those grieving the loss of pets.
- > ["Notes on Grief"](#) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. A memoir of the author's experience mourning the death of her father during the COVID-19 pandemic, touching on the familial and cultural dimensions of grief.
- > ["Death Nesting: The Heart-Centered Practices of a Death Doula"](#) by Anne-Marie Keppel. A death doula, trained nurse assistant, and expert in green burial shares spiritual and practical guidance for caring for someone at the end of life.
- > ["The Tibetan Book of the Dead for Beginners: A Guide to Living and Dying"](#) by Lama Lhanang Rinpoche and Mordy Levine. A concise presentation of several Tibetan Buddhist teachings, including how to meet death with courage and peace.
- > ["Ethical Wills: Putting Your Values on Paper"](#) by Barry K. Baines. A practical, spiritually-grounded guide to leaving a legacy and creating living wills and financial wills that reflect one's values.
- > ["Finding the Words: Working through Profound Loss with Hope and Purpose"](#) by Colin Campbell. Informed by the author's experience losing his children, he offers journaling prompts, rituals, and other practical support to those who are grieving.
- > ["Finish Strong: Putting Your Priorities First at Life's End,"](#) Second Edition by Barbara Lee Coombs. Written by the President Emerita of Compassion & Choices, this book is a practical guide to achieving the end-of-life experience you desire.
- > ["The Modern Loss Handbook: An Interactive Guide to Moving Through Grief and Building Your Resilience"](#) by Rebecca Soffer. A practical guide with prompts, creative projects, rituals, therapeutic exercises, and more.
- > ["With the End in Mind: Dying, Death, and Wisdom in an Age of Denial"](#) by Dr. Kathryn Mannix. A palliative care doctor shares profound stories from her 30 years of experience and makes a case for shifting how we approach and relate to death.

- > [“Advice for Future Corpses \(and Those Who Love Them\): A Practical Perspective on Death and Dying”](#) by Sallie Tisdale. Shaped by the author’s experience working as a nurse and in palliative care, she shares honest reflections on death and stories from cultures, traditions, and literature around the world.
- > [“The Art of Dying: A New Vision of Death for a New Millennium”](#) by Peter Fenwick and Elizabeth Fenwick. A book to help those who are dying, their loved ones, and health care workers better understand the dying process and accept death itself.

Films

- > [“Last Flight Home”](#) (Amazon Prime/Paramount +). Directed by his daughter, this Emmy-nominated documentary chronicles the remarkable life of Eli Timoner and his decision to use medical aid in dying in California.
- > [“Bob’s Choice: Why a Seattle Man Chose Death With Dignity”](#) (YouTube). This local news documentary follows Bob Fuller, a 75 year old terminally ill man with cancer, on his journey to using medical aid in dying to end his suffering.
- > [“Here Awhile”](#) (Prime Video). In this film, terminally-ill Anna returns to Oregon to reconnect with her estranged brother while making the choice to use medical aid in dying.
- > [“End Game”](#) (Netflix). Filmed and edited in an intimate vérité style, this movie follows visionary medical practitioners who are working on the cutting edge of life and death and are dedicated to changing our thinking about both.
- > [“Alternate Endings: Six New Ways to Die in America”](#) (HBO/MAX). An exploration of the changing attitudes in the United States surrounding death, including the ways it is recognized today and how many approach the end of life.

Additional Action Opportunities



For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die ... a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.

– Ecclesiastes 3:1,2,4

In addition to bringing vital conversations, resources, and educational programming to your faith community, there are other ways faith leaders can get involved with Compassion & Choices and advance this movement for end-of-life care and options.

- > Learn more about our Faith Engagement work and how you can plug in [here](#).
- > [Join the Faith Leadership Council](#).
- > [Volunteer](#) to advocate for the full range of end-of-life options in your state, including medical aid in dying.
- > [Urge your lawmakers to expand access](#) to end-of-life options.
- > [Attend an upcoming event](#) and invite your community members to join you.

Appendix

Group Norms

Group norms, also called agreements or shared commitments, serve as guidelines for discussion. They set expectations and help nurture an environment where open and honest sharing is possible. They can be helpful when facilitating support circles, study groups, or other group gatherings.

Below are some group norms you can choose to adopt; however, the norms you use should be collectively agreed upon by the participants or attendees of your event:

- > **Confidentiality:** What is shared in the group stays in the group.
- > **Use “I” statements:** Speak for yourself and from your own experience.
- > **Be present:** Life happens, but try your best to arrive on time and minimize distractions.
- > **Move up, move back (equal airtime):** If you tend to speak up often, try holding back to create more space for others to share. If you are reluctant to speak up or are more comfortable listening, try sharing your thoughts and ideas.
- > **Mutual respect:** Honor others’ perspectives, beliefs, emotions, and experiences, relating and communicating with respect.
- > **Active listening:** Allow everyone a chance to share without interruption. Listen with curiosity and the goal of understanding.
- > **Practice self-care:** Pay attention to how you feel and what is happening in your body, and care for yourself as needed. You can step out of the session whenever you need to.
- > **Assume best intentions:** Recognize that everyone is a work in progress and is showing up as best as they can. Be mindful of the impact of your words, tone, and actions on others, and be willing to take accountability and apologize when needed. If someone says something hurtful, offensive, or problematic, seek to address it in a way that promotes collective learning and growth.

Glossary

Advance Directive – Encompasses both living wills and medical durable power of attorney. Learn more [here](#).

Advance Care Planning – Involves making decisions based on your personal values, preferences, and discussions with your loved ones about the healthcare you would want to receive if facing a medical crisis, and then documenting those decisions in an advance directive. Learn more [here](#).

Diagnosis – Identification of a disease from its signs and symptoms.

DNR – Stands for “do not resuscitate,” a medical order making clear an individual’s request that no measures be taken to resuscitate them if their heart or breathing stops. The order is made while the individual is mentally capable and conscious, or by that individual’s health care proxy if they are not.

Hospice – Compassionate and personalized care to support an individual and their loved ones during the final months of life. Learn more [here](#).

Life-sustaining Measures or Life Support – Medical interventions that are commonly introduced when biological functions can no longer maintain themselves.

Living Will – A term commonly substituted for advance directive, but referring only to a document of stated wishes, not a document appointing a surrogate decision-maker.

Medical Aid in Dying – A safe, time-tested, and trusted medical practice in which a terminally ill, mentally capable adult with a prognosis of six months or less to live may request from their doctor a prescription for medication that they can choose to self-ingest to bring about a peaceful death. Where medical aid in dying is currently authorized, providers are required to confirm that a patient is fully informed and provide the patient with information about additional end-of-life options, including comfort care, hospice, and pain control, before providing a prescription. Medical aid in dying is the preferred terminology of several healthcare organizations. Learn more [here](#).

Palliative Care – A treatment option that focuses on symptom management, pain relief, and quality of life for patients with serious, advanced illness, as well as supporting their families. Learn more [here](#).

Palliative Sedation – Also referred to as “terminal sedation” or “total sedation,” the continuous administration of medication to relieve severe, intractable symptoms that cannot be controlled without rendering a person unconscious. This state is maintained until death occurs.

Prognosis – A forecast of the likely course or time to death as a result of a disease or ailment. The term is not used interchangeably with diagnosis.

Proxy or healthcare proxy – A person named as your healthcare proxy has the power to advocate for your medical wishes and make healthcare decisions for you if you are unable to do so. This person, also called a surrogate or medical power of attorney, is named in your advance directive, a legal document.

Terminal – Describes an illness for which the medical expectation is death within six months.

VSED – Stands for “voluntarily stopping eating and drinking,” a legal option for any seriously ill individual with decision-making capacity, who wishes to shorten their dying process, by foods and fluids of any kind, including artificial nutrition and/or hydration. Learn more [here](#).