

# CHAMPS

Center for Healthy Aging Ministries, Programs & Services



## Important Life Planning: Preparing Yourself and Others

*(Honoring My Wishes Workshop - Informational Article 2 of 5)*

There is excitement when a birth occurs in a family—a new beginning, a precious life to be nurtured. A lifetime of dreams and aspirations lies ahead. We plan and hold dear so many future goals. We want to hold onto each other and are not totally receptive to change. This is exemplified in the words of one pediatrician when discharging a newborn from the hospital—you will spend eighteen years wrapping yourself around this child's every need and deny the necessity to let go of him as he grows into adulthood.

We develop educational plans and personal goals, but seldom do we consider developing a concrete plan to deal with the unexpected changes that could result if unable to make your own health care decisions. We take for granted that our health is forever and secondly that technology can 'fix' everything. Consequently we are able to deny catastrophic injuries or our eventual death by holding any thoughts that this could happen to us at an emotionally safe distance—somewhere in the future; preferably age 100++ with perfect health. In truth we never know our future nor it's time limits, but we act like we do—like life and good health is infinite.

*"Show me, O LORD, my life's end  
and the number of my days;  
let me know how fleeting is my life..."*  
-Psalms 39:4

Seldom, if ever, are conversations held related to our desires for health care if the quality of our life is threatened by a debilitating (either physical and/or mental) accident, aging, or the progression of a disease (i.e., heart, cancer, Alzheimer's) that offers little or no hope of survival. Not only do we not discuss these

critical issues; we deny and procrastinate until the situation crashes into our lives. Then staring us in the face is the need to make all these decisions; decisions we should know the answer to but we are on emotional overload and unprepared to make them.

When individuals are asked why they haven't discussed these matters, they say, "My family members know what I want." We find more often that **people may not have decided** what they want done, much less told their family! It is careless to think our family members know what we would want done and are all in agreement. Have you thought about your health care preferences to be carried out in the event you are unconscious or unable to make competent health care decisions yourself?

We live in the solitude of our daily routines detached from the unexpected; the dreadful circumstances that only happen to 'someone else'. However, when these situations do occur, we respond with shock and disbelief. Our first reaction is often, "Do everything possible to keep my loved one alive."

*We cry out, My God, my God,  
why have you forsaken me?  
Why are you so far from saving me,  
so far from the words of my groaning?*  
-Psalms 22:1

Little or no thought is given to what the person would want done in these circumstances. Family and friends **are often caught up in their own needs and emotions**. The question becomes "What do you want done in these circumstances – instead if what would mom or dad want done?" Truth be told: most of the time **we don't know what the individual would want done--** we never discussed it!

There is a need to pray and spend time developing answers to questions like these:

- How long would you want your life preserved and under what conditions? (Brain damaged, paralyzed, advanced dementia, ventilator dependent, etc.?)
- If diagnosed with a life threatening disease, what are your priorities? What would you want to do or have others do for you? Are you willing to hold a family meeting to help each family member openly share their feelings and provide support for you and each other?
- Does age influence decisions about treatment? At 50, or 70, or 90 – we may change.
- How much pain are you willing to tolerate to overcome an injury or illness?
- Would you want to try some normal (or experimental) treatments on a trial bases?
- What religious values do you hold and want honored if you are terminally ill or dying?
- Do you fear physical or mental deficits the most?
- How would you want to handle the finances associated with your medical condition or end-of-life decisions? What are your thoughts on organ donation to save a life?
- If unable to communicate would you want everything possible done to be 'kept alive'?
- Do you fear death? What influences your understanding of death and dying the most?
- If facing death, are there religious practices you want done? Do you want family with you? Communion? Play Music? Read Scripture?

Planning for the challenging but inevitable isn't new. Prepare now to take a giant step in your life and follow the example of Jacob when he called his sons **together** in Genesis 49 to hear his directives. This was done in order to unite them in love as a family and to give them guidelines for their lives and instructions for his burial. He was teaching them how to live and how to die. The preservation of your values and history is in the hands of your family. While you are alive it is important to maintain your leadership and unite them around your wishes; your values.

## HONORING MY WISHES

We know all of us will die, but many of us prefer to avoid conversations about life-altering events or dying; which is ironic since we have the promise of eternal life from our Lord. ***Honoring My Wishes*** is designed to encourage Christians to engage in such conversations long before we need to make the decisions. The *Honoring My Wishes* Workshop is designed to:

- help people think about the kind of health care they will receive in their final days
- help people prepare for their death, and make plans for their funeral celebration
- help people make needed decisions to ensure that their wishes are carried out
- help people complete needed paperwork and communicate their decisions with loved ones
- help families know they are honoring God and their loves ones as they carry out those plans

In addition to the *Honoring My Wishes* Workshop Booklet, there are additional resources to help with locating valuable documents, making funeral plans; a sermon with outline, and five publicity articles to help people begin to think about these important matters prior to the workshops.

**(NOTE TO WORKSHOP COORDINATOR: Insert date, time and location of workshop here)**

We especially encourage grown children to attend with their parents so these important matters can be discussed together. Specially trained **Encouragers** will be available to assist each family to walk through these important decisions and conversations. You can obtain more information by contacting the church.

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CHAMPS Center for Healthy Aging, Ministries, Programs & Services  
13271 Millard Avenue Omaha, Nebraska 68137 (402) 895-2224  
Website: [www.champsonline.info](http://www.champsonline.info) Email: [champs@crossandheart.org](mailto:champs@crossandheart.org)

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