

ACP and Faith Leaders

1. Advance Care Planning (ACP) is important for all adults, all the time, regardless of age or health. However, in times of uncertainty, the need for ACP conversations becomes more pressing. ACP can provide a feeling of control and allow for deep conversations regarding choices and preferences in advance of a critical health crisis. When life seems filled with things we cannot currently control, having an advance care planning conversation, is a practical way to take some control.

What is ACP? This is defined as a three-part process that begins with identifying an individual's preferences for future medical care, if the person becomes seriously ill and unable to make choices at that time. Next, individuals discuss these preferences with family or friends, particularly the one designated to speak on the individual's behalf. The final step is to document that conversation.

2. **As leaders of our faith communities, you may be wondering how you can help. You have a unique opportunity to encourage your people to think about health wishes, in general, and to talk to their family, friends and you, as their faith leader.** No one can anticipate every choice that may relate to healthcare, but the process provides family with guiding principles to confidently make decisions. If individuals don't talk about what matters most to them, then, family can only guess.

You can provide members of your church with tools to have these important conversations. By encouraging ACP conversations, you can also support local healthcare providers who will, as a result, have quicker access to the preferences, wishes and goals of your people when they require medical treatment.

3. Faith can impact ACP conversations and the subsequent decisions. Questions might include:
 - a. What do your beliefs teach you about end of life?
 - b. What are your spiritual questions about end of life?
 - c. How do your beliefs impact your wishes for medical care?
 - d. What spiritual practices are important to you at the end of life?
 - e. What role do you want your faith community, friends and family to have in your end-of-life decisions?
4. Practical guidance on ACP conversations:
 - How to begin – Many people wonder how to initiate these conversations and how to connect their wishes to healthcare decisions. We recommend starting proactive care planning by using personal experiences such as the death of a family member, or friend,

to highlight what you learned from that experience and how it impacts your wishes now. You can also refer to movies, plays, books, etc. that have influenced you and made you think about these types of decisions.

- Priority #1 – For most adults, the priority is selecting a decision maker – someone they trust to make decisions on their behalf. This should be someone who will follow the identified preferences even if they do not agree with them.
- Resources – You can also help connect your people with a community Advance Care Planning facilitator, who is trained to facilitate these discussions and formalizing decisions in an advance directive.

Other resources that can be shared, include:

- The Death Deck
- Go Wish Cards (online version available)
- The Conversation Project Starter Kit
- Books such as: *Being Mortal*, *The Gray Zone*, *We Know How This Ends* and *Tuesdays with Morrie*

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