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**