



Peaceful Passing

Practical and Spiritual Reminders
for the End of Life

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One of life's most challenging experiences for many of us is the death of a loved one, especially if we are with them near the end. The dying process demands our spiritual awareness and calls us to practice what we say we believe. It also involves practical considerations we might never have encountered before.

This booklet is intended to bring peace and confidence to those who are preparing for death and those accompanying them on the journey. It includes practical advice and resources, while emphasizing the spiritual aspects of the dying experience. (Unity also has a booklet offering spiritual support for caregivers and a booklet about grief. Visit unity.org/booklet.)

The writers of these essays are people who have sat and prayed and sung with loved ones as they made their transitions into a new form of life. Some are also ministers and some are professionals with years of hospice and hospital work experience. One is a composer whose music for the dying has touched millions of lives.

Of course, each of us will die eventually. But before we do, most of us will be called to the bedside of someone we love who is dying—that is, entering a new form of being. We hope this booklet offers you comfort, insight, and support as you experience this greatest of life's sorrows and blessings.

Your Friends in Unity



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What We Know of Death



The Grace in Letting Go

Rebecca Winn

Autumn was particularly beautiful in Dallas last year. Rich crimsons, vibrant oranges, and luminous yellows with variations, depth, and intensity we rarely see here. Not many things about 2020 were perfect, but horticulturally, the conditions for a beautiful fall in North Texas were one of the year's most memorable blessings.

Autumn has always been my favorite season. The ease with which nature releases and lets go is inspiring. It is a message of trust most profound. Every year, autumn demonstrates how she willingly participates in the transitional nature of life and its attendant peace. It is an annual display of gentle surrender borne of a deep, cellular knowing that change is safe and all is well.

Last fall, it was not just the color explosion that caught my breath but the profound appreciation I felt for it. Sheltering in place during a global pandemic, with little refuge or company save for my garden, there was no taking autumn for granted. No, if ever there were a year when I was primed to find grace wherever I could, it most certainly was 2020.

In addition to its beauty, the autumn of 2020 was a time when we all, both young and old, were presented with the reality of death in a way few of us in modern, peaceful societies ever have had to face. In centuries past, the end of life was not something from which it was possible to be completely insulated. When wakes were held at home and family members were buried in cemeteries on homestead land, a healthy understanding of the reality, normalcy, and, indeed, the inevitability of death were ever present.

When I first heard death referred to as “making one’s transition,” it sounded overly euphemistic—an avoidance of the D-word. But as my ear grew accustomed to the phrase, I realized this had been the perspective, if not the phrasing, with which I was raised. My mother always referred to death as “just another phase of life.” It held no fear for her. Even though her great love, my father, had died tragically at the age of only 32, devastating her heart and our little family, she always managed to hold the perspective that the pain she felt was for her own loss of a husband and father to their two little girls, not fear of what death meant for him.

I believe the design of life is divine, all of it. The living of it and the transitioning from it. Nature knows this, but many of us have forgotten and thus create our own suffering by resisting this sacred step. Thinking of death as the end does not allow for the beauty of the mystery. The unfolding of the majestic unknown. The possibility that what comes next could be an ecstatic experience of peace. An expansion of consciousness beyond what we can imagine. What if in death the joy and fulfillment we strove for in life washes generously over us, swaddling us in the warm, deep peace of understanding? What if death is actually enlightenment?

By peacefully embracing the inevitability of death, be it distant or near, our current life becomes exponentially more

vivid. Knowing life is ephemeral sharpens the senses and reminds us of the profound gift each day gives. We as a society tend to place most value on things that are rare. Nature’s harvest, though ever abundant, is seasonal by design. When strawberries were only available in the summer for four weeks, they were much more highly valued than they are now that they are available all year. It is the same with our lives. As long as we deny life’s impermanence, we risk not fully savoring or appreciating it.

As I watched the colorful leaves fall in my garden last year, I couldn’t help but notice the grace of their descent. They floated, flipped, swished, and twirled like tiny, golden whirligigs spinning in giddy delight, with nothing to catch them save the soft, welcoming earth.

There is deep wisdom, faith, and grace in nature’s ability to let go.

Rebecca Winn is a landscape designer and author of the inspirational memoir One Hundred Daffodils: Finding Beauty, Grace, and Meaning When Things Fall Apart (Grand Central Publishing/Hachette, 2020). Visit rebeccawinn.com.



Death Is a Door

James Dillet Freeman

Faced with the passing of someone we love, our hearts cry out in the passion of loneliness and are not comforted with easy answers.

Our hearts tell us that we are meant to live, not to die. We are meant to express life ever more consummately. When someone fails to do this, we wonder why.

To understand the meaning of death, we must understand the meaning of life. Looking at life, we see that all things change. But although all things change, nothing perishes ...

If this is true in the world of things, how much more true it is in the world of mind! Soul has a substance of its own, no less permanent for being immaterial, no less real for being invisible. We cannot measure it with calipers or weigh it in a balance. We cannot feel it with our fingers or see it with our eyes. But it is there, substantial, real. It changes, but it will not perish.

Life does not begin with birth. It does not end with death. Life is an eternal process, an eternal progress. A visible form, an audible voice, an aggregation of organs, a network of ideas—we are more than these. These are the trappings of visibility. We are expressions of the Spirit of life ...

There is only life. The truth is that we cannot die, for we are life. Life is energy. Life is expression. It cannot end, because it is endless. We may change form and vanish from view, but we cannot cease to be. We never cease to be, not for a moment. We cannot be separated from life. We cannot be less than life.

Life is a road that winds among the hills of time. With every turn in the road an old view vanishes, a new view appears. Life is a pilgrimage, a passage through eternity, a journey into the unknown. People are as travelers on a journey.

Some pass quickly beyond the bend in the road that hides them from our view. Some walk beside us all the way. Some seem to creep along, and some pass as swiftly as a runner. But life cannot be measured in terms of time, only in terms of living.

When people die they do not cease to be; they only pass beyond human sight ...

Death is a door through which we pass into another room. It is a rest between two notes in an unfinished symphony. It is a page we turn to a new chapter in the book of life. It is not the end; it is a new beginning. It is not the fall of the night; it is another dawn.

We may not know just what will occur when we pass through the door. Yet we can trust the Keeper of Infinity. Life is the work of a grand and kind intelligence and has an order and a meaning beyond our power to see ... What scientist could have fashioned the human body? What philosopher could have thought of the laws that govern mind and space? What poet could have imagined love and wonder?

We can trust this intelligence that made the world. We were not made for dying, or for failure, or for pain. We are meant to live gloriously. We are the children of the Infinite. We have a divine destiny. We are advancing toward this destiny.

Out of the Infinite we came, and into the Infinite we return. But we are upward bound. We have risen through an eternity of experiences. We shall go higher yet.

James Dillet Freeman (1912–2003) was an internationally acclaimed poet, author, and lecturer. A Unity minister, he served as director of the Unity ministerial program as well as director of the Silent Unity prayer ministry. A longer version of this article first appeared in Unity Magazine, March 1995.

The Traveler

He [She] has put on invisibility.
Dear Lord, I cannot see—
But this I know, although the road ascends
And passes from my sight,
That there will be no night;
That You will take him [her] gently by the hand
And lead him [her] on
Along the road of life that never ends,
And he [she] will find it is not death but dawn.
I do not doubt that You are there as here,
And You will hold him [her] dear.

Our life did not begin with birth,
It is not of the earth;
And this that we call death, it is no more
Than the opening and closing of a door—
And in Your house how many rooms must be
Beyond this one where we rest momentarily.

Dear Lord, I thank You for the faith that frees,
The love that knows it cannot lose its own;
The love that, looking through the shadows, sees
That You and he [she] and I are ever one!

—James Dillet Freeman



A Moment of Oneness

Rev. Richard Carlini

I closed my eyes, took a deep breath, and let it out slowly so I could fully experience the moment. The hair on my arms was standing at attention and the goose bumps were still present. My realization on that morning, *I am a spiritual being on a human experience*, has carried me forward on this journey.

There were seven of them in the V formation. The morning sun was cresting the eastern horizon, and the bell tower at Unity Village glistened due west. The gray and white clouds were thick in places, yet there was enough space for the sun to shine through. The entire sky glistened with that mystical, early-morning hue that allows you to feel as though the universe is enfolding you.

I first spotted them cutting low across the labyrinth. I could hear their large wings flap as they moved up and down in the still air. If they were not already recognizable as a flock of geese, their loud honks gave them away. As they came closer, they swooped down lower and flew right above my head.

There was one more honk as they passed, then off they flew across the golf course. Just then, the 7 a.m. chimes began ringing in the bell tower.



I stood stock-still. I felt the flock fly overhead, a soft breeze from their combined movements. I have no idea what song the chimes were playing, but it didn't matter. At that moment, we were one. The geese, the chimes, the morning light, the sun, the sky, the universe, and I were one.

I savored the moment. I was completely present, fully aware that I was one with the One. I said it aloud as I stood and watched the geese fly away. *God and I are one*. Yes, there is only one presence and one power in the Universe, God the good, omnipresent.

I call it a mystical experience, but what is a mystical experience? It is a vision of how the world really is, not how we imagine it to be. In a mystical or spiritual experience, we realize our oneness with the Universe, aware and open to Truth.

It can be challenging to think of yourself as a spiritual being having a human experience. The truth is that this human experience begins and ends. We take our first breath as we enter humankind and breathe our last as we return to our true self, the spiritual being that we indeed are and have always been.

The practice then is to know our connection with the Universe, our oneness with God, while in human form. To know that we are each a unique spark of divinity, a spiritual being. We realign with this knowing through prayer and meditation, spending time in the Silence.

When I think of Unity cofounder Myrtle Fillmore, I'm confident she knew this human experience was temporary and that in Truth she was a spiritual being. Thomas Witherspoon

writes of a young Myrtle retreating to the banks of Big Walnut Creek, resting beneath the willows and oaks and watching the small animals and birds:

“[She] would tuck her hands under her head, with her face turned skyward, and soon she *wasn't there at all*. No, she would be way up among the fleecy, changeful, melting clouds. She would be among the swaying branches of the green trees, among the birds that sang and soared ... Somehow, she would seem to be one with all that was. Then suddenly her soul and body would be reunited and she would be aware that the process had taken place” (*Myrtle Fillmore: Mother of Unity*, Unity Books, 1977).

I am filled with gratitude for my mystical experience. I am grateful for the practice of remaining connected with my spiritual being during this journey into humankind.

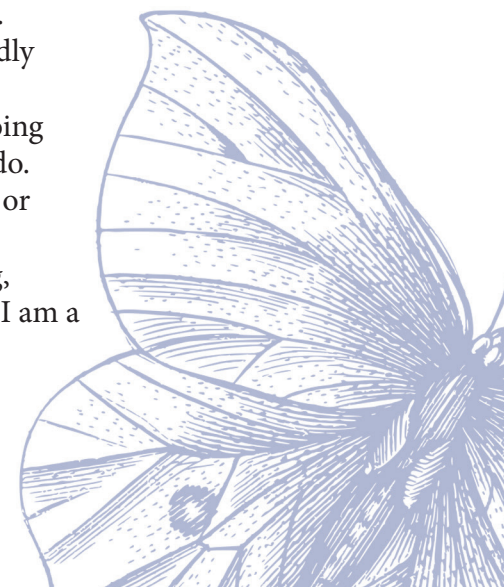
In your own practice, I invite you to affirm: *I am a perfect child of the Universe, grateful for my human experience, a spiritual being on this journey with God.*

Rev. Richard Carlini is a registered nurse and Unity minister who has spent decades working in hospice and palliative care. He is cohost of Healing Power of Grief, a weekly podcast available at unityonlineradio.org.

Treatment for a New Self-Image

I see myself as a spiritual being.
I am spiritually endowed with everything that I will ever need for my eternal ongoing.
I lack nothing.
I rejoice in the possessions of my life, but I am not possessed by them.
I rejoice in the people in my life, but I do not look back and long for the past.
I live today enriched by experiences of the past but free in the eternal now!
I hold no grudges.
I do not use the word *blame*.
I am a spiritual being, capable and strong in accepting the responsibility of my own person.
In the realization of my spiritual self, I find my oneness with my Christ within.
I am inwardly guided, outwardly protected.
I walk the way of this earth doing that which is mine to do.
I am not possessed by anyone or anything.
I am free in the warm, healing, loving realization that I am a child of God.

—Rev. Dorothy Pierson





What We
Experience



The Inner Circle

Cheri Jamison

Four days into sorting a mountain of my father's papers, I found the diagnosis. He hadn't told any of us, either by choice or because of his memory loss. With dread, I looked up the symptoms of stage 5 chronic kidney disease and recognized that my visit was no longer about helping my dad and stepmom clear clutter. My dad was going to die in a matter of days or weeks, and I had to be the bearer of that bad news.

Facing this unexpected reality and finding out Dad didn't want any life-extending interventions, I called a trusted minister with hospice experience for support. Dad and I hadn't been close during my adult years, so I wanted our remaining time together to be meaningful.

The minister said, "You have no right to what you want in this situation. This time is all about your dad and his wishes." I was shocked by his bluntness, but the more I thought about it, the more it strengthened me. This was a turning point.

This was not about me. It was an assignment from Spirit.

I was a daughter. I was also one of the few people in this unfolding drama who had a lifetime of spiritual practice. By seeing it as a call to service, to others as well as myself, I knew I could play a unique role that would be a blessing to all.

I realized what a sacred honor and responsibility it was to be one of the closest people to my dad as he prepared to transition,

part of his inner circle. I set a conscious intention about how I wanted to “be” while supporting my family: choosing a role of loving service; being the calm, peaceful presence he needed; and stepping forward in my spiritual power for resilience.

Over the next month, I was my dad’s cocaregiver alongside my stepmom, getting him on hospice and witnessing his transition. It was a marathon of human emotions and situations: anticipatory grief, regrets, stress, exhaustion, paperwork, overwhelm, advocating with doctors and hospice nurses, anger, anxiety from waiting, fear, facing mortality, awkward conversations about dying, communicating with other family members, holding with other people’s grief, protecting my family from unwanted, pushy religious conversations, plus all that surrounds the hours directly before and after death.

None of this was easy. Doing what needed to be done, while doing my best to hold a loving attitude, helped direct the scattered emotional energy of helplessness and anticipatory grief into outward action. I kept in mind one of my favorite quotes from John-Roger, “If you take care of yourself first, you can then take so much better care of those you love.” For me, that meant making sure I had a private space to sleep and restore, watching a sitcom to laugh daily, and meditating every morning.

The booklet *The Eleventh Hour* (see resources) by Barbara Karnes, R.N., was also an inspiration to me to help create sacred space for my dad’s transition while honoring that he

was not spiritual or religious. Much of that intention came from my own spiritual practice and was kept completely internal. I visualized his room surrounded by a great column of light that would provide him the spiritual energy and nourishment for his “labor” into the next world.

Touch became very important. I massaged his back and neck, sending sacred vibrations through my hands, intending to anoint his body as he prepared to release it. During the final hours, my stepmom and I made sure he was comfortable. Since he was a lifelong professional violinist, we played soft classical music, and I gently sang the aria “O mio babbino caro” (Oh, My Beloved Father) as I held his hand.

In the early hours of the morning, he passed. Through a dream, I believe I witnessed him crossing the veil even though I was not physically at his side.

This was by far the hardest thing I have ever done—physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually—but I’m proud of how I showed up.

In the end, that minister was right. By letting go of what I wanted and serving in my dad’s inner circle the way he needed, I found the meaning my heart longed for as well.

Cheri Jamison is program manager for Outreach and Engagement at Unity World Headquarters. She is also a speaker and classical singer.

A collection of pink flowers, including daisies and roses, scattered across a light-colored wooden plank background.

Let Go, Let God

Rev. Vernelle Nelson

Let go and let God. These words are never more relevant than when physical life is coming to an end.

Long before answering the call to ministry, I learned that the process of releasing one's body is a unique and very personal progression between the person who is transitioning and God.

I was in my teens when I first witnessed this phenomenon. My father's aunt was told by her doctors that she had only three months to live. Despite every medical and scientific indication, she told them she would die when she was "good and ready." Although she was quite ill, she did not make her transition for another 15 years. Her last hospitalization was about 90 days long. One day, she told me she was ready to "go home." The next day, she released her body.

Many years later, my father was told that due to a heart condition, he would die within two years. By this time, I was a Unity student. I clearly understood the Law of Attraction. Knowing that we are cocreators with God and that our thoughts create our realities, I reminded my dad that the decision to transition was between him and God. He was with us another four years.

During the last two years of his life, I traveled constantly between my home in South Florida and his home in the Washington, D.C., area to care for him. When his Baptist minister visited, we shared communion and prayed and worshipped together.

As his body became weak, there was little he could do for himself. My father asked if I was okay with his dying. At the human level, it was one of the most difficult things I had ever done, but on the spiritual level, giving him permission to let go was as easy as breathing. As soon as I uttered the words my father needed to hear me say, he leaned back and whispered, "It Is Well with My Soul"—the title of an old hymn.

Saying goodbye to the bodily form of a loved one can be a peaceful blessing when we allow ourselves simply to be present in prayer with the soul that is transitioning. A few years after my dad's transition, I was licensed and ordained. The majority of the work I do as a Unity minister is providing spiritual support for hospice patients and their circle of care.

Over the years, I have prayed with people young and old who were afraid of dying; people who were 100 years old who claimed to be ready to go yet were busy making sure loved ones

were taken care of or were waiting for something specific to take place; family members who were in denial that the end was near; and some who were truly at peace with the prospect of moving on to the next level of existence. I have witnessed the five stages of dying as described by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, M.D., and can attest to the fact that every situation is different.

When called upon to pray with someone near the end of life, I first tap into the powers of wisdom and discernment to guide me, relying upon the indwelling Christ to give me the right and perfect prayer for the situation. I find that there is no preordained plan or method when it comes to praying with people, especially those who are dying and their caregivers. Reminding a grieving relative that to be absent from the body is to be present with God may help bring closure for some but agony to others.

Our prayers are meant to comfort the dying as well as the living. A sincere, heart-centered prayer has unimaginable power to soothe, comfort, strengthen, and bring peace to anyone with whom we pray. Praying from the heart helps make the transition peaceful for the patient and comforting for loved ones, making the grieving process easier for those who are left behind.

Rev. Vernelle Nelson ministers through Unity Golden Life Ministries in Tamarac, Florida.



Strong in the Midst of the Storm

Rev. Gaylon McDowell

It takes a lot of spiritual, mental, and emotional strength to support a loved one while they are experiencing a serious illness or injury, especially when they don't have long to live in their bodies. We have to support our loved one while they are processing their illness and trying to make peace with their prognosis. And we have to get our own thoughts and feelings in order.

In my opinion, our spiritual work has to be deep and consistent before we deal with the extreme illness and/or transition of a loved one. In elementary school, we learn to “stop, drop, and roll” if our clothes ever catch on fire. We learn this technique at an early age so we can instinctively do it if the time ever comes. Similarly, all of the spiritual growth we attain prior to helping someone deal with an illness—or even our own illness—requires a lot of work at the outset.

In November 2010, my mother made her transition. After several months of wrestling with health issues, she had gone in for a procedure earlier that summer. During the procedure, the doctors discovered she had stage 4 cancer. I can still remember the doctor explaining to my sister and me that our mother didn't have more than about a year to live, even with chemotherapy. Was it possible that she could beat the cancer? Yes. Did the doctors give us a hopeful prognosis? No.

I am a New Thought minister who believes in spiritual healing; therefore, I went right into "ministerial mode" and began working on my consciousness to support my mother. I had to spiritually support my sister and my 10-year-old daughter as well. I discovered that I could find my spiritual center and support them by taking time in the evening to read spiritual literature then contemplate the wholeness of God in every situation.

My mother was in the hospital for a few weeks while undergoing chemotherapy and having her heart monitored due to the stress on her body. I would leave work and go sit with her in the hospital during the evenings and visit on the weekends. I had to pray before every visit because my mother was a hero to me. She was strong, wise, loving, and always supportive. She loved my friends and treated them as if they were her children. She was a person I knew I could count on. I had a challenging time seeing her physically weak, so I prayed before I got to the hospital, I prayed with her, and I prayed when I left. Those prayers helped me, not just my mother.

My sister and I told my mother that she needed to move in with me after she left the hospital. She fussed about it—a lot—but she eventually gave in and moved into my home. She was really struggling with the chemotherapy, the cancer, and the medications while living with me.

She eventually had a serious setback at my house and made her transition a few weeks later. The period between her last setback and her transition was tough on our family and friends. My sister and I had to take her off life support and then explain to our family why we believed she would have approved of our decision.

I officiated at my mother's funeral. I was spiritually stronger than I had ever been because I surrendered all of it to God and allowed myself to be a vessel for the Holy Spirit.

People often ask me how I handled my mother's illness and transition so peacefully. I tell them that I cannot say God is life and everything is fine in the presence of God when it is *their* mother, and then forget my Truth when it's mine. I truly believe she is one with God's eternal life. Her illness and transition taught me how to trust God more than I ever had before, and that was my mother's final gift to me.

Rev. Gaylon McDowell is the senior assistant minister at Christ Universal Temple in Chicago and host of the Truth Transforms podcast on unityonlineradio.org.

Accepting Change Without Fear

Rev. Alberta Ware

Several years ago I was afforded the opportunity to witness a young teenager from our church youth group accept change without any apparent fear whatsoever. More than just accept it, she orchestrated the process.

Here was a 15-year-old who recognized that things were not as they should be in her body. She reached out to a doctor, tests were performed, and she was hospitalized. While in the hospital, she spent time forgiving those with whom she had had disagreements, and she actively shared love and blessings, all without any complaints.

One Sunday after church when it was pouring buckets, I thought no one would be visiting the hospital so I went to see her. As on every other visit, all she wanted was for

me to pray with her, and as usual, I did. There are many kinds of prayer, but mine that day was a prayer of peace—her request.

She made her transition that week. Her example of accepting the changes she was experiencing was the greatest I have ever witnessed, and I am grateful for that very special opportunity.

I have also come to realize that when we are fully, consciously established in our relationship with God or a higher power, there is never a need for fear. It only takes a moment to remind ourselves of God's continuous presence in and with us, and we can release fear.

Rev. Alberta Ware is on the ministerial team at Christ Universal Temple in Chicago.

Walk with Me

When Lillie Riley stopped attending church, I knew something was wrong. For more than three decades, she was a pillar at Unity Temple on the Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri, and a dedicated member of our Myrtle Fillmore Auxiliary.

She and I became as close as a mother and daughter might be, although we had only met at the Temple a few years before. Ours was a soul connection. She insisted that I call her “Mama Lillie.”

I would drive her home after church, and we would sit in her kitchen and talk about the Sunday lesson as she served me one of her gourmet meals. The North Carolina native was a true Southern belle and an awesome cook. She cheered me on through ministerial school and visualized my reaching that goal even when I doubted myself.

When she began forgetting things she loved—like cooking—I realized something was wrong. Her doctor diagnosed the onset of Alzheimer’s disease. She was devastated and would often stop talking in the middle of a conversation, close her eyes, and become completely silent. When I asked, she would simply say, “I’m talking to God.”

She slowly lost interest in almost everything that she enjoyed—watching television, reading the newspaper and *Daily Word*, talking on the phone. But she continued to look forward to my visits after Sunday service. We would talk about the message

Rev. Sandra Campbell

and the meditation and she would encourage me to sing the songs. I always began with one of her favorite hymns, “In the Garden.”

As the Alzheimer’s disease progressed, I visited more frequently and arranged for home healthcare. Eventually I was forced to move her into a care facility near my home. On my daily visits, she looked forward to my reading *Daily Word*, recounting the Sunday service, and singing, always starting with “In the Garden.” The music seemed to keep her in touch with reality. She would sing along and move her hands with each note.

Noticing that the other residents listened to my songs, the activities director and I worked out a plan to gather them together for a sing-along on Friday mornings. The singing appeared to perk them up.

When Mama Lillie began declining, I engaged hospice care. During one of my last visits, the hospice volunteer advised that Mama Lillie’s time was close. I knew it was inevitable, but the thought of her leaving me was almost too hard to bear. She became less and less verbal and stopped opening her eyes. Except for the labored breathing, she did not appear to be present at all.

One evening, as I stared at her weak body lying still, I heard a voice in my head say, *I’m talking to God*. I knew she was sending me a message. Then something told me to sing.

Standing at the foot of her bed, I began to softly sing the words to her favorite hymn: “I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses; and the voice I hear, falling on my ear, the son of God discloses ...”

I had been told that hearing is the last sense to go when someone is in transition. I continued to sing and carefully studied her face for any sign of life. As I sang, the hospice nurse and I noticed something amazing. Mama Lillie began moving her feet from side to side to the rhythm of my voice.

It was then that I knew exactly what she was doing. Just as she had always told me, she was talking to God. Between the two worlds, there is no space for words.

Mama Lillie made her transition a few days later at age 94. I like to think our song that night ensured her peaceful passage on her journey. When I feel a longing in my heart to reach out to her, I simply begin singing, “And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own. And the joy we share as we tarry there, none other has ever known.”

Rev. Sandra Campbell is associate minister at Unity Temple on the Plaza in Kansas City, Missouri, and executive director of the Unity Urban Ministerial School.

Balancing Hope and Reality



Rev. Paul John Roach

The passing of a loved one is one of the hardest things we will face as human beings. Equally difficult are the many emotions and challenges that we and our loved one face as we approach that transition.

Central to this is our basic fear of death. However much we may have calmly considered its inevitability, and however comforting our belief system about the afterlife, none of us is prepared for the actuality of the loss. Even if we have faith in the continuity of life beyond the grave, the growing realization of parting can be devastating. The difficulty is compounded if we have added fears about where we will end up after death.

My first wife, Davis, died in her mid-50s from metastatic breast cancer less than two years after diagnosis. We both considered ourselves spiritually centered people, and we both believed death was but a transition from one realm of existence to another. We both knew intellectually that death can come at any time—my sister had died when I was 7 and she 5, for instance—but there is no preparation for the shock of facing loss and death.

After the initial diagnosis, my wife began to internalize the idea that a core of sadness within her had attracted this illness. We used prayer and affirmation to release such thoughts, and her approach to the illness changed. Hope was high during the months of remission. Then the cancer

came back in a more frightening and virulent form. After seeking a second opinion, it became obvious the prognosis was not good.

The three months before her death were the most difficult. Balancing hope and optimism with the harsh reality of the situation required mental and emotional fortitude. As a Unity minister I believed all things were possible, and that included a full healing. I also knew that denying the possibility of death was unhelpful and prevented me from being fully present to what was happening. Trying to sensitively navigate this balance is not easy.

I remember a friend coming over to sit with my wife just a few weeks before she passed. She confided to me after the visit that she felt the end was in sight. I remember my daughter and I were offended by what she said, even though I now realize that she was right. Our intense need to keep Davis alive had blinded us to the reality of the moment. At these times it is crucial to surround yourself with those you can trust to tell you honestly what they think and feel.

As the cancer moved into my wife's brain, she became increasingly erratic in her behavior and also in her fears. There were many sleepless nights as I lay beside her feeling helpless. I cherish those times now because I feel my presence was important to her, no matter how inadequate I felt.

One week before her passing we decided to take Davis to the hospital and she rallied enough to walk to and from the car. Shortly afterward she went into a coma.

I know that it is never too late to talk with your loved one. In the hospital, friends and family prayed, sang, played music, and took part in simple rituals. I felt the honor of being able to spend every moment with her. Davis waited, as many do, until all the family members had come before she made her transition, which was calm and serene. In those last days I sensed that her struggle was over and she accepted her death.

Davis often talked about playing in the fields of God. In the minutes after her passing, an image of these beautiful fields came into my head. In my mind's eye, they were filled with flowers. Then I heard Davis's words, *Oh, Paul, it's beautiful here.*

I felt she was confirming for me that all was well. The grieving process would continue for many more months and years, yet I realized that peaceful passing is choosing to welcome the horrors and joys, the sadness and the tenderness. Greater than the body, time, and change is the embrace of love, which is always with us.

Rev. Paul John Roach is a minister and writer in Fort Worth, Texas, and host of the weekly World Spirituality podcast on unityonlineradio.org.



What
We Can
Do



Hospice Is Medicine That Listens and Serves

Rev. Eleesabeth M. Hager

When we are in pain, it's hard to think straight. Most people want to die at home and pain-free. Hospice knows how to do this. It has powerful types of medicine that are not just from the pharmacy. Its team structure is designed to act from a holistic perspective of body, mind, and spirit.

The doctors, nurses, aides, social workers, and hospice chaplains generally feel called by a higher power to do this work. That said, they are also fallible humans. As a hospice chaplain, I have seen good transitions and could-have-been-better ones, but having hospice to support the dying process is always preferable.

Begin with Hospice Early

Every end is different, but it saddens me that so many people lose out on making the most of the time they have left by not using hospice. They lose out on a chance to put themselves in the driver's seat and craft a passing that is satisfying and a gift to all who witness it.

Most of life is easier in community. A good death is the same. You need a faithful team of family and friends and a hospice team who all understand your desires and wishes. It takes a bit of time to speak it into existence, so use the time well.

Finding a local hospice that listens, serves, and fits you is worth the effort. Interview the leadership. Ask how long the team has been together. Follow your heart and mind here. Do you feel valued and heard? I recommend having conversations with the social workers and chaplains too.

Body: Getting Comfortable

Hospice can make your last days comfortable physically. The types of medicine used are powerful and, used properly, lengthen the quality of life, not shorten it.

Medical options are adjusted as your condition changes, and options are reviewed each time the team meets. Speak up and say what is working and what is not.

It is important to feel heard, but it is also important to listen here. Escalate until the dialogue is balanced—or switch hospices. You have that right.

Mind: Feeling Safe Enough to Speak Truth

No matter what your spiritual or faith tradition is, if any, none of us know exactly what is next. Uncertainty may be particularly terrifying to the logical and rational parts of our minds that have no framework or possibility for fixing this. Sometimes our minds simply circle in fear. Faith is tested. Fear is not what we want to feel at the end—or while we're living, for that matter.

Acceptance is a process. Be patient. Talk to God. Pray with your faith community until you arrive at a safe enough place to make some decisions.

Talk to your family and friends and to your team. What would a good end look like for you? What are your goals in the time you have left? Talk to your family and begin to work backward to achieve it.

Find the person you are comfortable speaking with about what you are feeling, and find the person who comforts you in doing it. Allow the comfort in. People tend to show up when you would not expect it.

Spirit: Wisdom of the Higher

Here, we need to remember whatever is higher. Your faith leads. God also accompanies your loved ones who are walking with you to the end of life but not the end of love. It is our human journey. As Ram Dass says, “We’re all just walking each other home.”

Every human being is unique but in death, we are all on the same return journey. Know that no matter our plans, love is at the helm.

Rev. Eleesabeth M. Hager is a hospice chaplain and author of A Hospice Chaplain's Field Guide to Caregiving: Finding Resilience on the Frontlines of Love (Zip Sisters Publishing, 2017). Visit emhager.com.

Who Will Speak for You?

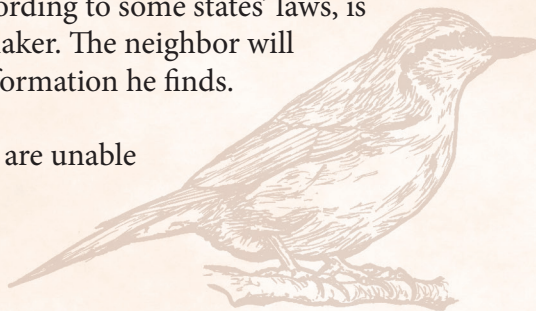
Rev. Kathleen Flynn

The scene is a hospital intensive care unit, Anywhere, USA. The patient is a 78-year-old man transported to the hospital emergency department by ambulance from home, where he apparently lives alone. His neighbor Jim found him lying on the kitchen floor, unconscious, and called 911.

The emergency responders, ER doctors, and ICU medical team administer emergency protocol drugs and intubate the patient who cannot breathe on his own. The team will also treat him as a *full code*, which means they will do chest compressions to restart his heart should it stop.

The team knows little more than the patient's name: Reuben. According to neighbor Jim, Reuben is widowed and has a daughter who resides out-of-state. The neighbor agrees to look through Reuben's personal things to find a name, address, or phone number. The daughter, according to some states' laws, is now Reuben's medical decision-maker. The neighbor will call the hospital with whatever information he finds.

Who will speak for you when you are unable to speak for yourself?



For nearly five decades, advance directives have been promoted as the primary tool for people to use in communicating their wishes regarding emergent and end-of-life care. According to *Health Affairs*, a leading health policy and research journal, only 36.7 percent of participants in a recent study had completed an advance directive or living will.



What if Reuben's desire is to pass peacefully—to die a natural death? What if his heart arrests before his daughter is located or, when reached, his daughter sadly has no idea what her father wants?

Medical professionals without patient directives are left to do what they have taken an oath to do: save lives. If this 78-year-old patient goes into cardiac crisis, cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) or chest compressions are the medical protocol unless there is a family member to speak for the patient or a written advance care directive naming a medical power of attorney. After CPR, survival rates in patients over 70 years of age decrease and, when surviving, the patients' quality of life may be seriously affected.

Medical professionals recommend that everyone, especially older adults with advanced chronic illnesses, talk to their loved ones about their wishes regarding resuscitation and end-of-life care. In addition, expressing your wishes in a document takes minutes compared to the hours of uncertainty when medical providers have no choice but to intervene.

Advance healthcare planning documents, such as living wills or advance care directives, are the patients' voices when patients

cannot speak for themselves. Otherwise, a doctor, judge, or distraught family member may be making medical decisions without knowing a patient's wishes or beliefs.

Most hospitals, medical centers, and doctor's offices have advance directive forms available to patients. Most attorneys, especially those who do estate planning, can create a medical power-of-attorney document naming an appointed decision-maker. The National Institute on Aging website provides comprehensive information for guidance in end-of-life decision-making. (See resources.)



Ending our lives well is like putting a period at the end of a well-crafted sentence. It is simply not complete without it. Give the gift of peace of mind to your loved ones by starting the conversation, telling them your preferences, and inviting their participation.

As for Reuben, his friend Jim did locate his daughter who spoke with doctors about her dad's wishes. She said he had lived his life peacefully and wanted to die the same way. She traveled to be with him as the mechanical supports were withdrawn so he could have a peaceful ending.

Reuben had given his daughter the gift of peace by clearly expressing his desires, so she could speak clearly for him when he could no longer speak for himself.

Rev. Kathleen Flynn, chaplain, BCCC, is a Unity minister who lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. She is a hospital chaplain and grief recovery specialist.

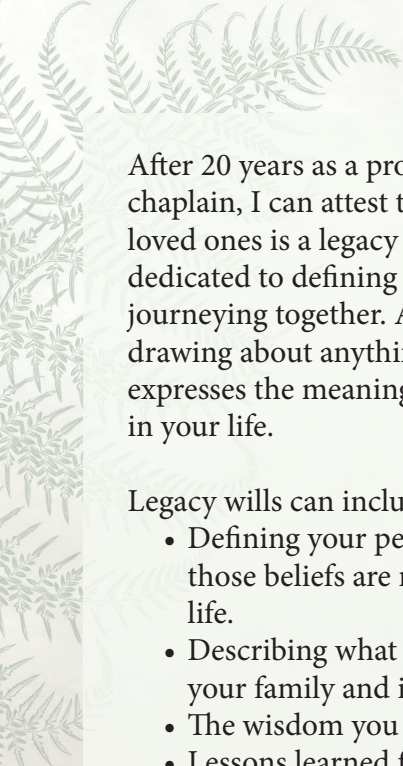
Beyond Stuff: Leaving Your Legacy

Rev. Kathleen Flynn

Moments aren't permanent; love is. Meaningful living is even more significant with intentional or meaningful dying, filled with acts of love.

In this, my 75th year, my thoughts turn to one of my next adventures—departing this planet. Of what value is the wisdom I've gained over three-quarters of a century? And to whom? Besides the artifacts, collections, and things inherited, what lasting and meaningful beyond-stuff can I leave my two children?





After 20 years as a professional hospital and hospice chaplain, I can attest that the piece most cherished by loved ones is a legacy will—also called an *ethics will*—dedicated to defining the texture and depth of their journeying together. A legacy will is a letter, poem, or drawing about anything that is significant to you and expresses the meaning or contribution others have made in your life.

Legacy wills can include:

- Defining your personal values and beliefs. Sometimes those beliefs are related to your religious or spiritual life.
- Describing what it has meant to you to be a part of your family and its past generations.
- The wisdom you wish to impart to future generations.
- Lessons learned from the great teacher, life.
- What you have to say about love and what you love about your family.
- Any lingering desires to forgive or ask forgiveness for.

My mother died suddenly at age 69. My sister, brother, and I inherited material things that were precious and meaningful, including an abundance of family photos.

In addition to the photos, the item I treasure most is a birthday card found on my mother's desk, addressed to me. It was signed simply "Love, Mom." She had been too ill to finish and send it through the mail.

That was 35 years ago. I have passed on many of her things to my children and grandchildren. I've deeply appreciated the photographic history of our family. Yet that card became her legacy will to me.

Even though I would have liked for her to write more, I know she was too ill to do that. In her compromised health, she had done the best she could. The card expressed through those carefully crafted Hallmark words what I meant to her. A deep and lifelong, loving relationship was acknowledged and held close with all the effort she could give it. Priceless.

If you are not sure what to say or how you want to say it, there are several websites that offer guidance and samples of legacy letters or ethical wills. (See resources.) In addition to letters, some people make videos or record their voices so future generations can see or hear them. Keep in mind that technologies can become outmoded.

Rather than wait to write your love letters to others, start now, before the unexpected takes away the opportunity. Help your beloveds fill the physical void death creates. A peaceful passing is made so much more so by preparing a thoughtful goodbye.

We really are never too young to begin the behavior of loving others beyond our passing.



The Healing Power of Music

Gary Malkin

There's an old adage that says the most significant journey we'll ever make in this life is when we travel the distance from our minds to our hearts. It is my belief that music, especially when offered with an intent to soothe, inspire, and heal, has the power to awaken us to our God-given capacity to love and be loved.

After 60 years of creating music, I'd like to share a bit of what I've learned about music's healing power, especially when the music is intended to serve as a catalyst for the feelings associated with love, loss, forgiveness, compassion, and gratefulness, to name a few. It results in a palpable connection with ourselves and others in ways that can heal on many levels.

I have come to know in my bones that my losses—and the acceptance of death—are what make life possible in a very fundamental way. Some years ago after an enormous and unexpected personal loss—with all of its understandable pain and sorrow—I finally could see the opportunity for awakening that was presenting itself to me.

Allowing myself to fully experience and move through my losses and let myself grieve was what allowed me to release the overwhelming emotional clutter I had been carrying in my heart and soul for a very long time. I noticed I was finally releasing that which had been clouding, confusing, burdening, and interfering with my true ability to claim the life I'd like to live.

Encountering this deep invitation to face grief as a pathway to the life that was awaiting me was a key reason I accepted Michael and Doris Stillwater's invitation to compose music for a double

CD to be called *Graceful Passages: A Companion for Living and Dying*. After three years of endless hours in the recording studio, *Graceful Passages* became a musical soundscape that underscored spoken messages from some of the world's humanitarian visionaries, representing a variety of cultures and traditions. We recorded the spontaneous words of compassionate teachers speaking from an immediacy of loving-kindness—Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Mahatma Gandhi's grandson Arun Gandhi, Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and many others.

After the release of *Graceful Passages* in 2001, we received thousands of letters, emails, and phone calls from people whose lives were powerfully touched by the music and messages. They said it helped them reframe illness, death, and loss as inherent parts of the circle of life, so that they could be met with equanimity, acceptance, and compassion rather than denial, avoidance, and fear.

This is where music can be a significant tool, helping people take steps toward the ultimate realization of their circumstances. Music has a way of wrapping the unspeakable with a comforting blanket. It creates a backdrop and focus of attention within which we contemplate, reflect, wrestle with conflicting thoughts and feelings, and ultimately find acceptance for what is before us.

It's All Vibration

What is it about music that makes it a spiritual catalyst and companion for those significant transitions and passages in our lives? Could it be because music is made up of actual vibrations,

which are, at every scale, the common denominator of the universe? Or could it be because we are vibrationally based, spiritual beings on a human journey?

Music that has been created to drop us into our hearts can induct us into the present moment through this most essential sensory awareness—listening. Slow, heart-centered music can catalyze a direct experience with the great mystery, the dimension of life that cannot be explained or understood rationally.

Therefore, music can be understood as a connector between worlds, with simultaneous existence in the realm of the living as well as the realm of vibratory frequency or the unified field, beyond space and time. Music connects us to the unseen worlds within us and around us, the part of us that crosses between worlds.

Music can assist us in feeling more relaxed, safe, connected, and fearless, especially when we are approaching significant transitions such as life-threatening illness or the dying process, or when we are with someone approaching theirs.

When we let music move us emotionally, the human part of us opens to be met. When this happens, there exists an entryway to our soul. To appreciate music as a companion to our soul's evolutionary journey gives us practice in the art of letting go.

Grateful for Life

Music can help provide a preliminary experience of meeting parts of ourselves not contained by space or time or even by the

body itself. By allowing music to be our mentor in relaxing and letting go, we nurture a relationship that will serve us throughout our lives and through the end of life as well.

When this dynamic is understood and experienced fully, it can be the catalyst for a great awakening and expansion into a realm of a profound gratefulness for the very preciousness of life.

And when you can use music, subliminally or overtly, to instill direct experiences of what cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrien, Ph.D., calls “the arms of love”—compassion, service, kindness, appreciation, forgiveness, and presence, for example—chances are you’ve significantly increased the propensity for healing by addressing your losses head-on.

Next time you find yourself in an environment where dis-ease or the fear of dying is present, allow yourself to experiment with this phenomenon by integrating, however subtly, deeply soothing music that you truly love into your field of attention or subliminally into your environment. You’ll see that music can provide a powerful support tool for the healing journey, keeping you open, porous, humane, and grateful for being alive.

This is what I call truly living!

Gary Malkin, seven-time Emmy Award-winning composer and producer, created the recording Graceful Passages: A Companion for Living and Dying with Michael Stillwater. Visit wisdomoftheworld.com.



Resources

When we began collecting additional resources to help with a peaceful passing, we found so many that they would overflow this booklet. So we have created a page on the Unity website where you will find links to books, articles, and music with information and inspiration for the end of life. Type in this address: unity.org/peacefulpassing.

Most of these resources, recommended by the writers of the *Peaceful Passing* booklet, offer practical guidance. Some are about the active process of dying, and others are to help prepare in advance for the end of this human experience. Still others offer emotional support.

We hope they benefit you on this most spiritual of journeys.

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