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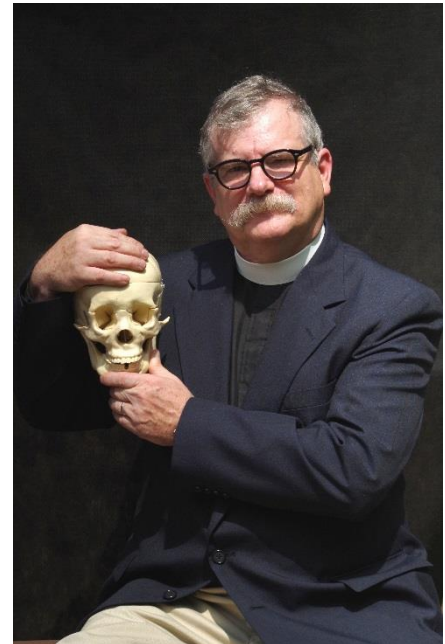
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Final Affairs at St. Thomas, Vernon

"I hope this isn't a spoiler for anyone," says the Rev. Dr. Howard Whitaker, "But we're all going to die."

In anticipation of that inevitable event, St. Thomas' Episcopal Church is hosting a Final Affairs Fair. "Think of it as like a Wedding Fair or Home Fair," quips Whitaker, "but with a little more significance."

"Don't expect hearse rides and cotton candy at this fair," adds St. Thomas Warden Kathy Moore. "But there will be a lot of information."



*The Rev. Dr. Howard Whitaker and friend.
(Photo: Chris Wyman)*

Presentations are scheduled from Funeral Consumers' Alliance and the Memorial Society of North Central New Jersey, as well as experts in estate planning, anatomical gifting, hospice and bereavement, advance medical directives, "green" burial options, and funeral planning.

According to Whitaker, although advanced planning for end of life issues can save money, pain, and stress on people and their families, these conversations can be very difficult to start. People know more about buying a cell phone than they know about buying end of life services. In four hours at St. Thomas', families can get the information and permission they need to open these discussions.

"As a priest, I hear people say things like 'I don't want to be kept alive if I'm dead,' or 'give me a plain pine box,' or 'just put me in the garden,' but unless you do some planning and empower your survivors, that's not going to happen," warns Whitaker. "At the same time, some people are more comfortable with aggressive interventions and a very traditional funeral process. Survivors need to know about prior wishes and the financial resources to carry them out."

"And don't be putting burial instructions in the lock box at the bank," says Whitaker. "File them with your church or put them in a zip lock bag in the refrigerator where your family can get to them."

When questioned about whether the event might be considered inappropriate or crass, Whitaker replies, "We are the church. We are supposed to be about ultimate things. If the church can't help people face the end of life, we should just close shop."

The Final Affairs Fair will be held on Saturday, September 6, from 10 am to 2 pm. St. Thomas' is located at 307 Route 94 in Vernon. The fair is free, although donations are welcome. More information can be found at www.st-thomas-vernon.org.