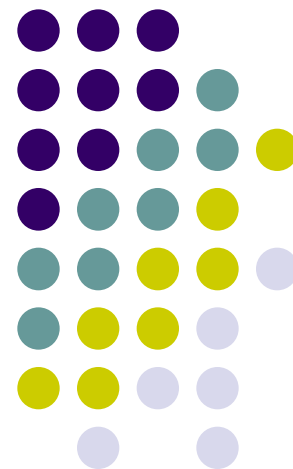


Now and At the Hour of Our Death

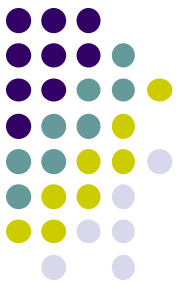
Fr Kevin McGovern,
St Cecilia's Church, Glen Iris:
St Roch's Adult Faith Evening,
20 March 2017.



Overview of this presentation



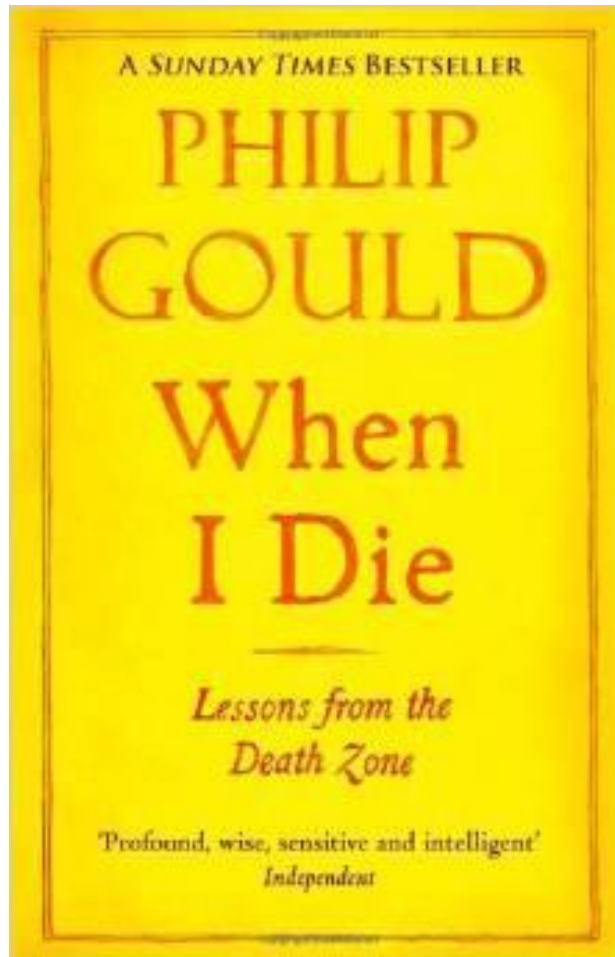
1. The Spiritual Quest
2. End-of-Life Decision-Making
3. Catholic Teaching and Resources
4. Practical Considerations



1. The Spiritual Quest

- Bruce Rumbold, “Dying as a Spiritual Quest,” in *Spirituality and Palliative Care: Social and Pastoral Perspectives*, 195-218:
 - **Restitution Narrative**
 - “I got sick. I got treated. Now I’m completely recovered.”
 - **Chaos Narrative**
 - Nothing makes any sense.
 - **Quest Narrative**
 - A quest is the story of a man or woman who journeys to a strange land in search of treasure.... This time, the strange land is the world of suffering and sickness. But there is treasure there too.
 - “Responding to the call involves initiation into suffering and trial, then (hopefully) transformation...”

1. The Spiritual Quest (cont'd)



- “Intensity comes from knowing you will die and knowing you are dying.... Suddenly you can go for a walk in the park and have a moment of ecstasy.... I am having the closest relationships with all of my family.... I have had more moments of happiness in the last five months than in the last five years.” (p. 127-129)
- “I have no doubt that this pre-death period is the most important and potentially the most fulfilling and most inspirational time of my life.” (p. 143)

Henri Nouwen's *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*



- Henri's secretary Connie Ellis had a stroke: "She who had always been eager to help others now needed others to help her." (pp 96-97)
- "I wanted Connie.... to come to see that, in her growing dependency, she is giving more to her grandchildren than during the times when she could drive them around in her car.... The fact is that in her illness she has become their real teacher. She speaks to them about her gratitude for life, her trust in God and her hope in a life beyond death." (pp 103-104)

Henri Nouwen's *Our Greatest Gift: A Meditation on Dying and Caring*



- “She, who lived such a long and very productive life now, in her growing weakness, gives what she couldn’t give in her strength: a glimpse that love is stronger than death. Her grandchildren will reap the full fruits of that truth.” (p 104)
- “Not only the death of Jesus, but our death too, is destined to be good for others... to bear fruit in other people’s lives.” (p 52) “In this way, dying becomes the way to an everlasting fruitfulness.” (p 53)

2. End-of-Life Decision-Making



- From C20, modern medicine has greatly increased average life expectancy
 - BUT
 - many more are old, frail and chronically ill
 - towards the end of life, medical treatment probably won't cure, but may make a final illness and death very unpleasant ('dysthanasia')
 - towards the end, many are unconscious/incompetent → at that time, cannot say no to further treatment



**“You have about six months.
But with cutting edge medical treatment
we can make that seem so much longer.”**

2. End-of-Life Decision-Making (cont'd)



‘Living Will’ or Advance Care Directive

→ Substitute Decision Maker

→ Substitute Decision Maker, along with Statement of Wishes and/or Advance Directive

Catholic Teaching



- Each person has a moral responsibility to use those means of sustaining our lives that are effective, not overly burdensome and reasonably available ('ordinary' or 'proportionate' means).
- Each person has a moral right to refuse any treatment that is futile, overly burdensome or morally unacceptable ('extraordinary' or 'disproportionate' means).

Catholic Teaching (cont'd)



- Catholic Teaching therefore provides a basis for End-of-Life Decision-Making.
- Gerontologist Myles Sheehan SJ says that Advance Care Planning is just as much a pro-life issue as euthanasia and abortion: it is pro-life to seek to preserve people from unnecessary suffering at the end of life.

3. Catholic Teaching and Resources



- *Advance Care Plan*
- *A Guide for People Considering Their Future Health Care*
- *A Guide for Health Care Professionals Implementing a Future Health Care Plan*
- Download them all for free from **Catholic Health Australia** website: <http://www.cha.org.au/publications.html>

A Guide for People Considering Their Future Health Care



- The focus should be on ongoing communication (NOT just filling in forms!)
 - “Planning your future health care requires good communication between you and your family, friends and health care professional.”
 - Forms and other records should serve rather than replace the ongoing conversation.
 - Forms – including medical notes or an advance directive – can indeed be appropriate especially for those who have serious illnesses or those who are frail and elderly.

A Guide for People Considering Their Future Health Care (cont'd)



- Recommends Substitute Decision Maker before Advance Directive
 - “A health representative can make decisions on your behalf.... These health decisions have the advantage of being flexible in response to changing circumstances.”

A Guide for People Considering Their Future Health Care (cont'd)



- Guiding Your Substitute Decision Maker
 - “A good future health care plan should... aim to provide them with clear guidance... which can be adapted according to changing circumstances.”
 - “You can allow your representative to make health decisions for you, or you can provide that person with specific advice, verbally or in writing, or by having it recorded in your doctor’s records.”
 - You can also use – and recommend – CHA’s *Advance Care Plan*.



CHA Advance Care Plan

- an excellent document for most people, especially those who are in reasonably good health
 - appointing a representative (p. 1)
 - guiding my representative (p. 3)
- Catholic Health Australia Advance Care Planning website: <http://myfuturecare.org.au/>

Extraordinary or Disproportionate Means



- Futile and/or
- Overly burdensome
 - physically too painful
 - psychologically too distressing
 - socially too isolating
 - financially too expensive
 - morally repugnant
 - spiritually too distressing
- ‘heroic’ or ‘cruel’ treatment
- may be refused

Standards for Decision Making



- Best Interests
= we decide for them
- Substituted Judgment
= we speak for them (i.e. we seek to identify the decision that they would make)
 - USCCB's *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, #25: "Decisions by the designated surrogate should be faithful to Catholic moral principles and to the person's intentions and values, or if the person's intentions are unknown, to the person's best interests."

4. Practical Considerations



- Communication about End of Life Decisions:
 - If I am very sick and it could go either way, how hard do I want the health professionals to try to save my life?
 - If I have advanced dementia and I develop pneumonia, do I want treatment to try to cure the pneumonia?
 - If it is possible, do I want to be an organ and tissue donor?

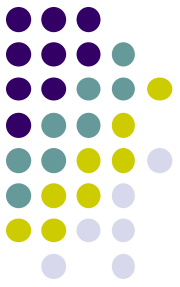
4. Practical Considerations



- Other Matters
 - Have I made a will? Do I have special things that I want to leave to specific people? (Make a list!)
 - Any last messages for anyone?
 - As death nears, do you want:
 - people to be told you are sick and asked to pray for you?
 - people with you? Who?
 - to have people talk to you and hold your hand, even if you don't seem to respond?
 - Funeral wishes
 - e.g. readings, hymns, readers, pall bearers, etc.
 - Burial wishes
 - What else is important for you?

Crossing the Bar

by Alfred Lord Tennyson (1809-1892)



- Sunset and evening star,
 And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
 When I put out to sea,
- But such a tide as moving seems asleep,
 Too full for sound and foam,
When that which drew from out the boundless deep
 Turns again home.
- Twilight and evening bell,
 And after that the dark!
And may there be no sadness of farewell,
 When I embark;
- For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
 The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
 When I have crost the bar.

Presenter

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