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ADDITIONAL SUGGESTED RESOURCES:

Peter Bien, On Retiring to Kendal (and Beyond) , Pendle Hill Pamphlet 368, 2003, Pendle Hill Publications, Wallingford, PA.

Elizabeth Gray Vining, Facing One's Own Death, 1979, Spoken Essay for the Committee on Worship and Ministry for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Printed by the Book and Publications Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, Philadelphia, PA, 1979.

Ernest Morgan, Dealing Creatively With Death, A Manual of Death Education and Simple Burial, 2001, Upper Access Inc., Hinesburg, Vermont

Mark Harris, Grave Matters, A Journey Through The Modern Funeral Industry to A Natural Way of Burial, 2007, Scribner, New York, NY



Aging Resources Consultation Help

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End of Life Decisions and the Testimonies



Q: *“How do I make provisions for the settlement of all outward affairs, so that others may not be burdened and so that I may be freed to live more fully in the truth?”*

The Advices, PYM Faith and Practice, 2002

Decision Making and the Testimonies:

Most Friends have some awareness of the Testimonies and how central they are to the Religious Society of Friends, since they take the place of a creedal statement. With the introduction of the mnemonic 'SPICES' to help young people remember the Testimonies, an increasing number of adult Friends can name each of the Testimonies as well: Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship. Sometimes lagging, however, is the ready application of the Testimonies to everyday situations and decision making.

This is particularly true of end-of-life decision making. Too often Friends make those decisions in the context of the surrounding culture, rather than use the Testimonies as a context and guide to making decisions in the manner of Friends.

Simplicity guides Friends in the choice of burial arrangements, how the Memorial Meeting is conducted, and any reception afterwards. It also guides Friends to make decisions ahead of time, pre-planning and, perhaps, pre-paying.

Pace for some Friends means having their wishes clearly stated in advance directives and wills to keep family members from arguing over their care or about distribution of the estate. The Testimony of Peace invites Friends to make peace, to forgive and ask for forgiveness of any and all. To say, "I'm sorry, please forgive me, thank you, I love you," is the greatest gift that can be bestowed on those left behind.

Integrity speaks of honesty and truth telling, having one's affairs in order, living a life that is of a piece. Integrity calls Friends to an honest assessment of their medical situation and speaking of it truthfully. Integrity means honestly facing one's diminishments and need for care; accepting that the feeling of being independent and in control may come to an end, for, in truth, people are never as independent and in control as they imagine.

Community reminds Friends that they are part of a worshipping community and as such, they have a responsibility to offer help and support to each other when there is a need, whether that is listening, driving, or praying. Community also recognizes the requirement to accept the gifts of care, help, and support offered by the worshipping community. It is in this mutuality of giving and receiving that we act on our testimony of community.

Equality calls Friends to be fair in their dealings with family, not treating anyone as a "favorite." It can also invite consideration of "Jubilee," that is, restoring justice, making amends in either a personal or a global sense.

Stewardship is the newest Testimony and not named by all Yearly Meetings. Stewardship reminds Friends that we have borrowed the earth from future generations. That understanding might impact decisions about embalming, preparation of the body, and choice of burying grounds. Reflection on the requirements of Stewardship should also prompt Friends to have their affairs in order.

" Help me to loosen, fiber by fiber, the instinctive strings that bind me to the life I know. Infuse me with Thy spirit so that it is Thee I turn to, not the old ropes of habit and thought. Make me poised and free, ready when the intimation comes to go forward eagerly and joyfully , into the new phase of life that we call death...

...Give me joy in awaiting the great change that comes after this life of many changes, let myself be merged in Thy Self as a candle's wavering light is caught up into the sun. "

Elizabeth Gray Vining, 1978, PYM Faith and Practice 2002

