

MAPPING YOUR EXIT

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Several years ago my wife, Sue, and I attended a workshop outlining how to prepare for one's passing. We found it to be quite helpful and chose to repeat the workshop for several groups – including our church home, Central Presbyterian in Eugene, Oregon. This short essay is meant to convey the main points of that planning – things to do that make the transition easier for you – and more importantly for members of your family who will be involved with your affairs after you are gone! These are items you need to document in a notebook, and show to family members, so that your choices are carried out!

1. CHOSING A PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE – TRUSTEE

This very important person should be someone well known to you, who will have the important decisions to make regarding handling the estate, and other personal matters. Your choice, and their acceptance, should be documented in a form letter. That letter does not need notarization.

2. WHOM TO NOTIFY

Make a list that includes your primary doctor, family kin, personal representatives, mortuary, church, attorney, professional and social organizations of interest.

3. ALL YOUR STUFF AND WHERE YOU WANT IT TO GO

This difficult process should be done before your departure. Make a list of major items that you possess, and with the help of family members determine their ultimate location. Clean out cupboards and drawers of non-essential clutter and dispose appropriately. Identifying old pictures will be very helpful. The list goes on, and on – get rid of stuff now!

4. YOUR PAPER TRAIL, ASSETS, LIABILITIES, ETC.

Your important papers (your will, trust, property deeds, mortgage and other documents) may be in your home file, your attorney's office or in a safety deposit box. The locations of these documents should be known to your personal representative and family members.

5. YOUR FINANCIAL MATTERS

Your CPA will have copies of your tax records, but you may have assets and liabilities known only to yourself. Family members should be made aware of where such papers are kept – personal files or safety deposit box.

6. MEMORIAL SERVICE PLANS AND WISHES

Your wishes regarding the kind of service to be observed after your death should be discussed ahead of time. This may be, however, beyond your control, since your family will have the last word! A variety of venues are possible, and the content of services varies considerably.

7. YOUR FINAL DISPOSITION

Burial or cremation – possible organ donation? Arrangements should be made before death. Choosing a mortuary well ahead of time is important.

8. YOUR HEALTH CARE AND MEDICAL DIRECTIVE

Perhaps the most important thing you should do, as soon as possible, is to document your choices about end-of-life care. By filling out a POLST form (Physician Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment), and being sure that your doctor and family are aware of your desires, you can be more at ease contemplating the future. A similar document, Advance Medical Directive, accomplishes the same thing. It states your medical treatment wishes, should you be unable to speak for yourself. An Advance Directive can be used to a) Appoint a Health Care Representative; b) Provide Health Care Instructions; or c) Both of these things – worth filling out and discussing with family. A document certifying your choice of a person as your Power of Attorney for Health Care Decisions needs to be notarized.

Those of us living in Oregon, and four other states, have the opportunity to utilize a ‘Death with Dignity’ option at the end of life! Hospice care has improved markedly in the past couple of decades, and works cooperatively when patients request this option. The Compassion and Choice Organization is available when patients face a painful or difficult terminal condition. It is reassuring to know these options are available to us!

Sue passed away in 2011. So I lived through the process described above. I found it extremely helpful, and commend it to your consideration. ‘Getting rid of Stuff’ was the most vexing – but ended up happily when all seven children got together on a weekend, and chose by lot among themselves, the items most important to each one!

Is it time to **‘MAP YOUR EXIT?’** Good Luck!

Useful Websites:

www.caregiverslibrary.org/.../grp-end-of-life-issues.aspx

www.aarp.org/home-family/caregiving/end-of-life.html