Advance Care Planning
Empowering church members to faithfully prepare for end-of-life

“If I were suddenly rushed to the hospital with COVID-19 symptoms or another life-threatening illness unable to make health care decisions for myself, would my loved ones know what I would want, or would they have to guess?” Susan R. Jacob, PhD, RN, of the UT Health Science Center College of Nursing offers insight into why and how clergy can help people in their congregations find peace of mind in answering this question.

As people in positions of trust, clergy are in unique positions to come alongside individuals at times of illness and death. Anyone of any age can face a medical emergency and be unable to make wishes known. If clergy explain that it’s important to have conversations about end-of-life care before the time comes, people will often take their advice.

Terms to understand
Advance care planning (or life planning) is an organized approach to reflecting on your own values and goals for living well and dying well.

Advanced directive (or living will or Five Wishes) is written instructions to describe your specific wishes for medical care in the event you become incapacitated and cannot speak for yourself.

Health care agent is a person who can make medical decisions for you when you are incapacitated, named in a durable power of attorney or medical power of attorney.

Five Wishes
Attorneys can help with end-of-life planning and create living wills and durable powers of attorney. In many situations, a popular tool that 37 million people have accessed in the last 20 years might be a helpful choice. “Five Wishes” is an advance care planner written in everyday language that covers spiritual, medical, and legal wishes all in one place.

Wish 1: The person who will make decision for me. Wish 4: How I want others to treat me.
Wish 2: Medical treatment I want or don’t want. Wish 5: What I want my loved ones to know.
Wish 3: How I want to be comfortable.

When you fill out the form, you can select from the options listed and cross out anything you do not agree with.

Five Wishes meets legal requirements of 42 states with only two witnesses. In the remaining states, extra steps will make sure the care planner complies with state requirements. Tennessee does not require notarization. You can update your wishes at any time.

The peace of mind that comes with an advance directive document is a gift for everyone involved. Five Wishes is available from https://fivewishes.org.

Church Health hosted a webinar called “Advance Care Planning: Empowering church members to faithfully prepare for end-of-life.” It is available for viewing on our website, http://churchhealth.org/fce/.