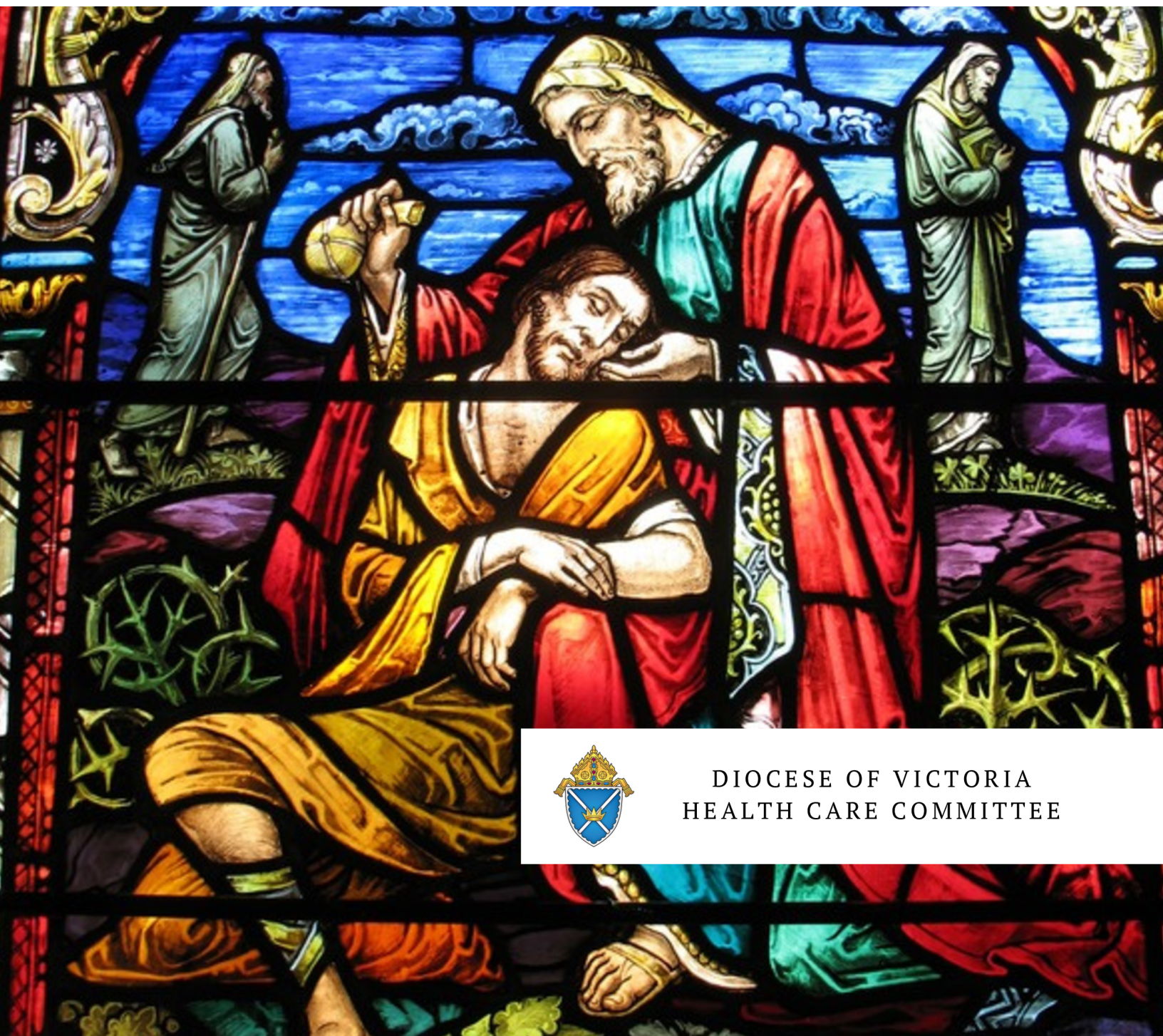
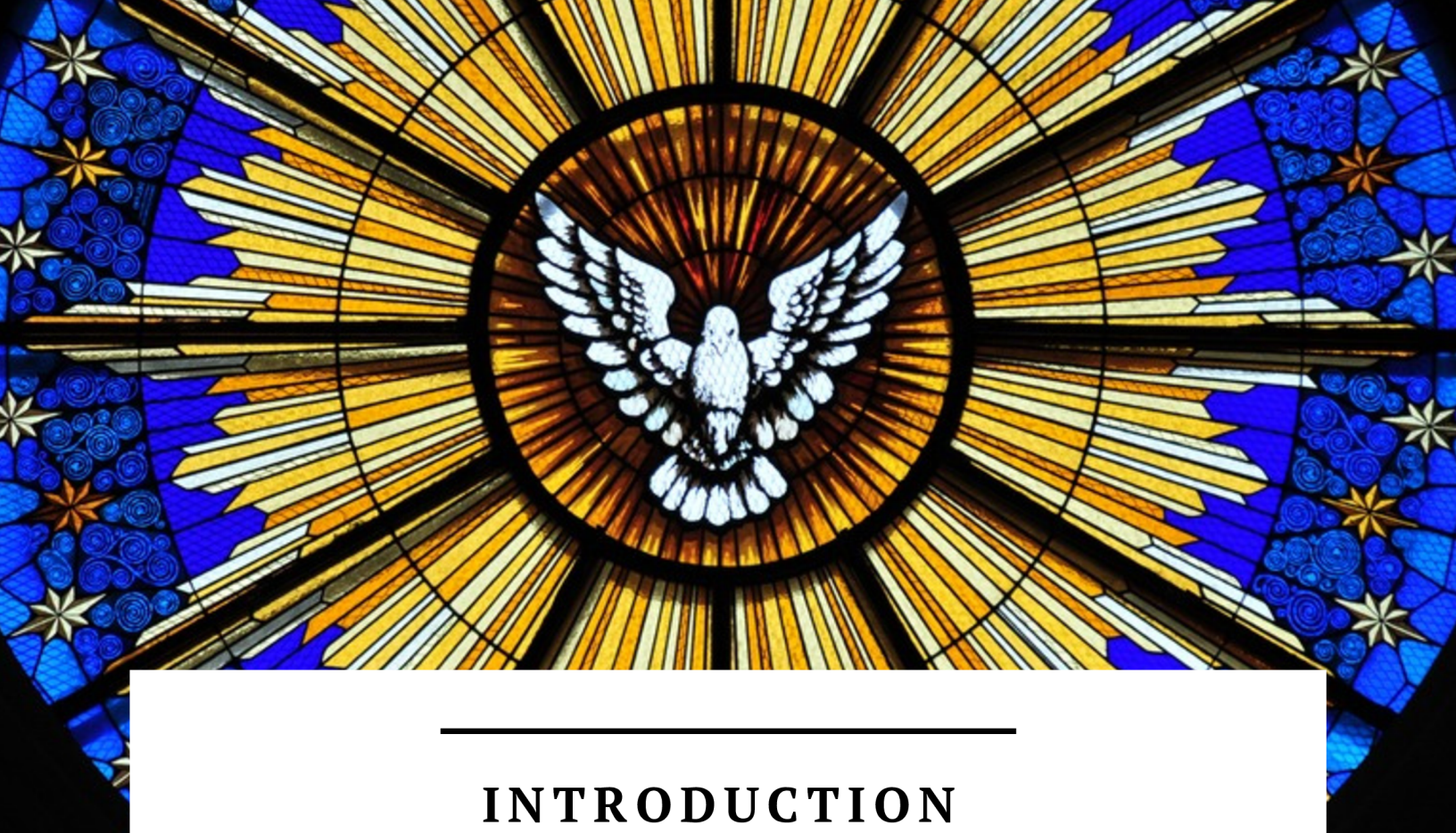


**A CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE:
WHAT FAMILY MEMBERS NEED TO KNOW
BEFORE AND AFTER A LOVED ONE
ENTERS ETERNAL LIFE**



**DIOCESE OF VICTORIA
HEALTH CARE COMMITTEE**



INTRODUCTION

Can it be too early to start earthly life discussions and planning?
Not at all!

Yet, many wonder about this as they accompany a family member or friend who is seriously or terminally ill.

Families may find themselves in unfamiliar situations and full of unanswered questions.

Our hope is that this Guide helps to facilitate meaningful conversations grounded in the tenderness of our living Christ. As Catholics, our faith in Jesus Christ has much to teach us about living well until natural death.

It is often easier to start conversations about dying by first focusing on conversations about living.

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PREPARING FOR CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

What information can your loved one share that you need to know about their situation now? What is important to them now?

What are their values, hopes, and wishes? If they become unable to speak for themselves, what do they need others to know about their health and living situation?

SPIRITUAL NEEDS & SUPPORTS

We often focus so much on meeting the many practical and physical needs of our loved ones in their final days that we can lose sight of their spiritual needs.

- ☐ Would they like a visit from a priest and also a pastoral care visitor?

- ☐ Would they like to receive the Sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and viaticum (Holy Communion for the journey), a source of spiritual nourishment?

ESSENTIAL PRE-DEATH PLANNING: MEDICAL & EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

An Emergency Medical Information Package is one way to communicate important medical and social information, as well as personal wishes.

☐ Check if your loved one has created such a package.

This Emergency Medical Information Package is customarily placed in a plastic folder on the front or top of the fridge, where Paramedics and other First Responders know to look when they arrive at the home.

The package can speak for your loved one if they are too ill to speak for themselves. It is helpful for family members to have a copy of this Emergency Medical Information Package.

A medical alert wrist band or pendant is another option for communicating medical information. You may be familiar with MedicAlert, though there are several different brands. These items give responders quick information on one's allergies, medical conditions, and even code status.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL INFORMATION PACKAGE

An Emergency Medical Information Package usually contains the following:

- ☐ The individual's name and personal health number
- ☐ A list of current medications and supplements
- ☐ A list of allergies
- ☐ A medical history, including recent surgeries
- ☐ Additional considerations, such as dependents and pets in the home
- ☐ Whether there is a pacemaker or other implants, and the location of the implants. *This information is critical if First Responders need to place Automated External Defibrillator (AED) pads on a patient.*
- ☐ Names of family and friends to contact in case of emergency, and their contact information
- ☐ A signed Do Not Resuscitate (DNR*) order, if there is one

**A DNR order means Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) should not be attempted if their heart stops beating. Without a DNR order, paramedics are obligated to attempt resuscitation.*

Find the DNR form here:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/forms/302fil.pdf>

KEY INFORMATION TO GATHER IN ADVANCE

Your loved one may have already initiated plans for their future care needs.

Ask about any Advance Care Planning they already have in place, including:

- ☐ An ADVANCE CARE DIRECTIVE. This is a formal document describing the type of care they wish to consent to or refuse in the event of incapability at the time care is needed. It is directed to the physician or other health care provider. For more information, please visit:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/family-social-supports/seniors/health-safety/advance-care-planning>
- ☐ A REPRESENTATION AGREEMENT, in which they have legally named someone they trust to be their representative to make decisions about their health and care needs.
- ☐ An ENDURING POWER OF ATTORNEY, in which they have appointed another person to make financial and legal decisions for them.

KEY INFORMATION TO GATHER IN ADVANCE CONTINUED...

- ☐ A CURRENT WILL. Ask about its location. The will identifies the executor who is responsible for carrying out the instructions in the will. The executor also provides permission for the funeral home to collect the deceased. If there is more than one executor, it would be best if they live in the same city to make things easier for signing purposes and time zones.

- ☐ Any CATHOLIC FUNERAL PRE-ARRANGEMENTS. Perhaps they have already chosen a funeral home and made pre-payments. Do they wish to have a burial or cremation? Suggestion: Add this information to your will.

- ☐ ORGAN DONATION REGISTRATION. Is their name on an organ donation registry? Do they wish to consider an organ donation? Pope Francis described organ donation as an “expression of universal fraternity that binds all men and women.” (*Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the Italian Association for the Donation of Organs, Tissues, and Cells (AIDO).* *The Holy See, 2019, Apr. 13*)

MORE IMPORTANT INFORMATION

It is recommended to keep all the information below in one place.

Vital Statistics information, including:

- ☐ Full legal name of your loved one
- ☐ Date of birth or even a copy of their birth certificate
- ☐ Personal Health Number and Social Insurance Number
- ☐ Occupation
- ☐ Name of the spouse or partner (if applicable)
- ☐ Full names of parents and their birthplaces

Location of their important documents, including:

- ☐ Will, with an original signature
- ☐ Birth certificate, citizenship, residency, or immigration papers
- ☐ Marriage certificate, divorce, or separation papers
- ☐ Financial papers, including bank statements, pension statements, and mortgage papers
- ☐ Deed to house/property
- ☐ Vehicle registration papers
- ☐ Life insurance policies

MORE IMPORTANT INFORMATION CONTINUED...

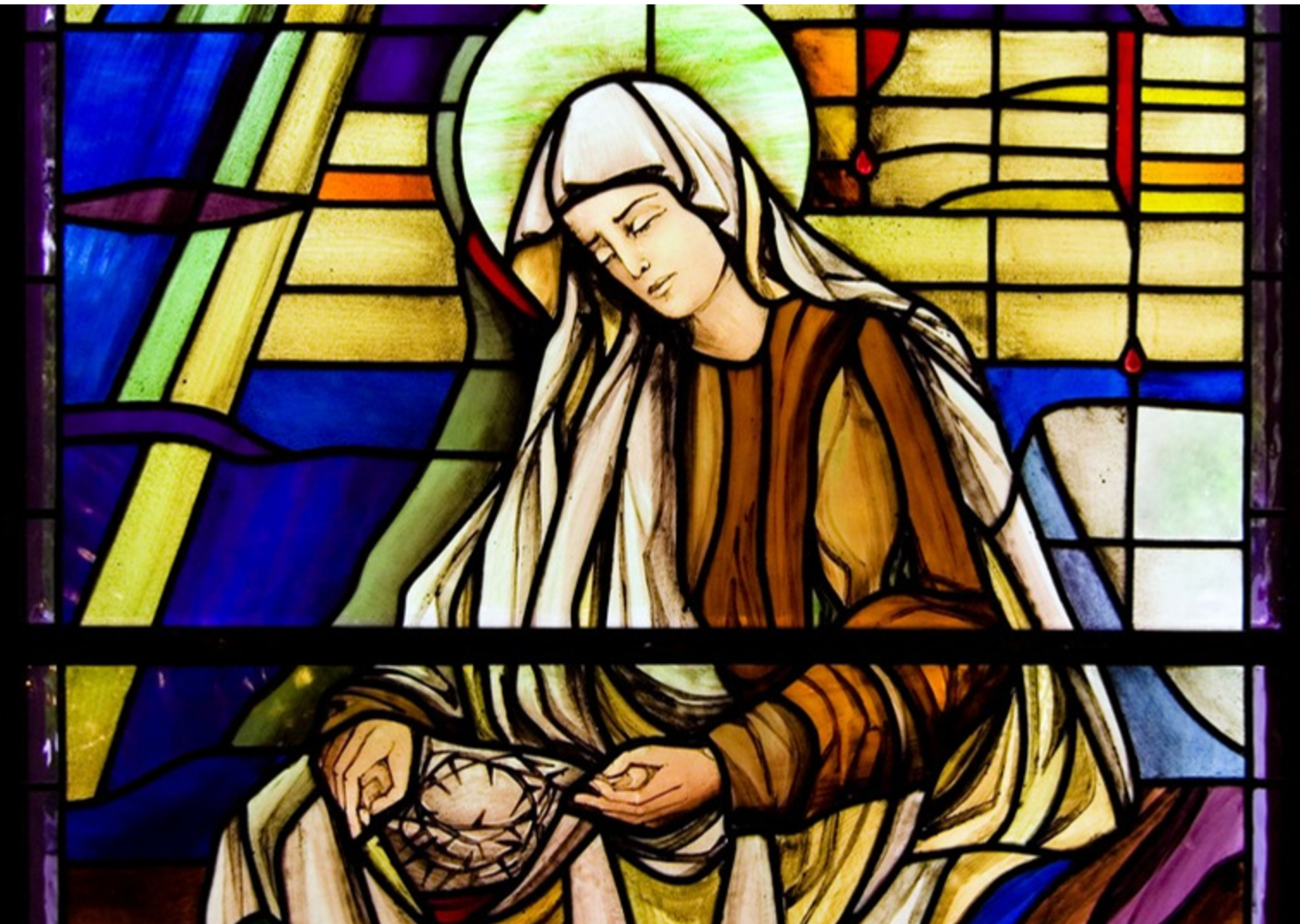
Names and Contact Information of Important People

- ☐ Family members and close friends
- ☐ Parish priest and other religious contacts
- ☐ Doctors and specialists
- ☐ Lawyer, who prepared their Will and would have a copy if needed
- ☐ Accountant
- ☐ Financial advisor

WHAT TO DO AFTER A LOVED ONE DIES

Having a checklist of what to do after the loss of a family member or close friend can help us navigate through one of the most challenging parts of life.

Who to contact immediately after someone dies depends on whether the death was expected or not, and whether it happened at home or in the hospital.



EXPECTED DEATH AT HOME

A person with a life limiting illness may choose to be in familiar surroundings at home with family and friends when the time comes to be received into the joy of God's kingdom.

A "Notification of Expected Death in the Home" form is completed by the patient's physician and sent to the funeral home before the death occurs. With this form in place (see next page), a formal pronouncement of death is not required.

Some families may still prefer to have a pronouncement of death by the physician or nurse practitioner, and may contact their health care provider according to plans previously discussed.

For more information about a "Notification of Expected Death in the Home" form, see the Joint Protocol For Expected/Planned Home Deaths in British Columbia, pg. 4-5: https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health-safety/home-community-care/care-options-and-cost/expectedplanned-home-deaths/expected_home_death.pdf

EXPECTED DEATH AT HOME CONTINUED...

The “Notification of Expected Death in the Home” form confirms that:

- ☐ The death will be natural and expected within days or weeks.
- ☐ The family has chosen to decline a pronouncement. Instead, they agree to wait at least one hour after breathing has stopped before calling the funeral home to remove the body.
- ☐ When pronouncement is declined, there is no need to call 911, and neither the coroner nor the physician/nurse practitioner needs to attend the home.
- ☐ The physician (or their designate) agrees to complete the Medical Certification of Death within 48 hours.
- ☐ The person legally responsible for the deceased’s remains has authorized the funeral home to transfer the body in accordance with Section 8 of the Cremation, Interment and Funeral Services Act.

UNEXPECTED DEATH AT HOME

In all circumstances where the death is unexpected, you will need to call 911 or the BC Coroner's Service (1-855-207-0637).

When placing a call to 911, you will hear "911, what is your emergency?" or "911, do you need fire, police, or ambulance?" Respond that a death has occurred. Provide the details you have.

Provide the number you are calling from and the location. If an apartment, provide an access code if applicable. Keep the house door unlocked. Remain on the line.

The 911 dispatcher will continue to ask questions to assess the situation and provide details to the first responders as they are on the way.

The police will notify the coroner, who may also attend the home to make an assessment. The BC Coroners Service investigates all unnatural, sudden, unexpected, unexplained, or unattended deaths in British Columbia.

If the death appears to be natural, the police or the coroner can arrange for transportation of the deceased directly to the funeral home of choice.

DEATH AT A HOSPITAL OR CARE FACILITY

To request a visit for someone sick or dying in Victoria, contact the Hospital Chaplain at 250-889-3761. For requests in other areas, contact the nearest parish (<https://www.rcdvictoria.org/parishes>).

Within the hospital or care facility, a physician or nurse practitioner pronounces the death of a patient. Staff notify next of kin if they are not already present.

In a hospital, the body remains on the unit for a short time, if possible, to allow the family a chance to say good-bye before their loved one is moved to the morgue.

In a care facility, there is usually no morgue. The executor named in the will provides instruction to release the loved one's body to the funeral home.

If an executor is not available, the law provides an order of priority of who can give instructions to release the deceased to the funeral home. The first choice is the executor, followed by the deceased's spouse, adult children, and so on.

AFTER DEATH CHECKLIST

The order for these steps may vary according to your circumstances. Not every step will be applicable for you.

Make the Calls

- ☐ Locate the will or apply for a will search (at the Vital Statistics Agency) if the will cannot be located
- ☐ Speak with the funeral home. Funeral homes generally register the death for you
- ☐ Register the passing if you are not working with a funeral home and do not have a Death Certificate. Call Vital Statistics 1-888-876-1633
- ☐ Identify who needs to be notified right away—family, friends, employers, caretakers, appropriate health care providers, and/or agencies
- ☐ Contact the parish office if your loved one desired a Catholic funeral
- ☐ Inquire when the priest is available to schedule an appointment.

Arrange for Care

- ☐ Minors or dependents
- ☐ Surviving spouse or partner who may need assistance
- ☐ Pets

AFTER DEATH CHECKLIST CONTINUED...

Arrange for Security

- ☐ Check that the home and any other property are secured
- ☐ Check the contact list for a person who can assist with these details

Obtain Death Certificate

- ☐ Receive the Death Certificate (with multiple copies) from the funeral home. Banks, insurance agencies, government agencies, and others may request a certificate
- ☐ Review funeral plans or service preferences as specified in the will

WITHIN TWO WEEKS

The following tasks need to be addressed relatively quickly, and depending on the situation, some may take priority over the others:

- ☐ Locate important documents
- ☐ Forward mail to a responsible party
- ☐ Apply for death/survivor benefits. A funeral home can assist.
- ☐ Contact life insurance companies

WITHIN TWO WEEKS CONTINUED...

Contact:

- ☐ Life insurance companies
- ☐ Service Canada (1-800-277-991), regarding Canada Pension Plan & OAS
- ☐ Other Pension Plans, such as BC Pensions, Canadian Forces Pension, or Veteran Affairs Canada

Other Death Benefits:

Where appropriate, these may be available from:

- Workers Compensation
- Insurance Corporation of BC
- Union
- Federal and/or Provincial or city service
- Other employers

Cancel:

- ☐ Passport or Citizenship Certificate
- ☐ BC medical card
- ☐ Driver's license
- ☐ Credit cards

An important reminder: Remember to look after yourself too. Allow time and space to grieve after a loss. Give yourself permission to ask for assistance. Take time for your own physical, emotional, and spiritual needs.

FIRST NATIONS, MÉTIS & INUIT CUSTOMS & CONSIDERATIONS

Cultural practices and customs vary among the different First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities.

Communities, families, and groups may each have their own way of caring for their dying, and for honouring the loved one who has died.

Ask how you may best support the family in their efforts to honour their dying or deceased loved one.



Bentwood box carving by Temosen (Charles Elliot),
St. Andrew's Cathedral, Victoria

DEFINITIONS & KEY TERMS

Some excerpts from the former Catholic Health Association of British Columbia (CHABC):

Extraordinary Care (*also referred to as disproportionate care*):

See Ordinary Care (below). Where proportionality does not exist, the remedies are to be considered extraordinary.

Informed Consent: This requires that an individual has the information and understanding necessary to make a reasonable decision in his or her own best interest and has the competence and freedom to make his or her own decision.

Hospice Care: Hospice care is a special kind of health care for the terminally ill and support for their families and/or caregivers. Hospice is comfort care without curative intent.

Moral Certainty: This is the confidence that all of the conditions required for making an informed decision have been met beyond a reasonable doubt, with the elimination of all contrary probabilities.

DEFINITIONS & KEY TERMS

CONTINUED...

Ordinary Care (*also referred to as proportionate care*): This refers to any treatment, operation or procedure that offers a reasonable hope of benefit without serious risk of excessive burden, subjective repugnance, or extreme pain or expense.

Palliative Care: An approach for people and their families facing challenges associated with life-threatening illness. Palliative Care sees dying as a normal process of life. It seeks neither to shorten life, nor to inappropriately prolong death. Patients can continue to receive curative and therapeutic care such as chemotherapy, radiation, dialysis, and surgery while receiving palliative care. You may start palliative care at any stage of your illness, even as soon as you receive a diagnosis.

ONLINE RESOURCES

- My Voice: Expressing My Wishes for Future Health Care Treatment (English):
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/people/seniors/health-safety/pdf/myvoice-advancecareplanningguide.pdf>
This guide, produced by the BC Ministry of Health assists with planning for your own future health care. Advance care planning forms are included.
- After a Death: What to Do When Someone Dies - Province of British Columbia (includes an easy-to-use checklist):
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/death/after-death/first-steps>
- BC Coroners Service - Province of British Columbia:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/life-events/death/coroners-service>
- What to do when someone dies - Canada.ca:
<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/life-events/death.html>
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Victoria:
<https://www.rcdvictoria.org/>

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

The image on the front cover of this resource guide is of a stained glass window from Saint Peter's Church in Washington, DC, depicting the Good Samaritan—a timeless reminder of love, mercy, and the call to serve our neighbour.

In this parable, Jesus reveals that true charity is more than sentiment; it is love expressed through action. The Samaritan does not turn away but stops, tends to the wounded man, provides for his care, and promises to return—embodying compassion that is attentive, practical, and persevering.

This same spirit of mercy guides the Church's ministry to those who are dying and to the loved ones who accompany them.

As this resource guide offers practical and spiritual support before and after a loved one enters eternal life, it invites each of us to follow the Good Samaritan's example: to draw near, to care, and to bear one another's burdens with faith, hope, and love.

