Notes from Fr. Nick

**Documents You Need to Prepare**

During this Lenten season, many of us are taking on the project of preparing for our deaths. While this may sound a little morbid, it strikes me as just the sort of thing Lent is made for. A couple of years ago, as a Lenten penance, I assembled several documents that should help my associates, family, and friends if I’m very sick, or dying. We’re preparing for the memorial of Jesus’ death and resurrection, so why not materially prepare for our own?

What are these documents? A Will seems obvious, but the other two will be more important to help friends and family comply with your desires when you unable to speak for yourself. These are a Durable Power of Attorney and a Living Will (or Advance Health Care Directive). A Durable Power of Attorney designates someone to attend to your affairs if you cannot. A Living Will expresses your desires for medical treatment when you are not able to do so, and therefore it is essential that the person to whom you designate your Durable Power of Attorney has access to your Living Will as well.

An important element in a Living Will and/or Durable Power of Attorney is the designation of the person or persons who will dispose of your remains after you die. As well, it should state how would you like your remains to be treated (burial, cremation, donation of organs, etc.). However, it’s important to know that a Durable Power of Attorney ends with death. After my father died last April, it was fortunate that my mother was still alive and could decide what to do with his remains. Otherwise, I would have had to get permission from all my siblings before I could have my father cremated.

Many people seek the assistance of their lawyer to assemble these documents, and that is good advice. An attorney is familiar with these documents, how they must be constructed, and who should have them. He or she can to assist your family to ensure that everyone concerned is aware of how they work.

Nevertheless, you can assemble these documents on your own. There are several Internet sites that provide templates of these documents for a fee, as well as free sites that explain how to write them in a legal manner. It’s important to review your documents from time to time (I’m doing this now). As circumstances and your desires change, you are free to alter these documents — or attach codicils — as long as you possess the mental capacity to do so.

Preparing your Will, Living Will and Durable Power of Attorney may not be comfortable experiences, but the peace of mind you will gain knowing that you’ve made important decisions before their need arises is worth the effort. Finally, taking on this task as a Lenten observance will add a spiritual dimension that in a very real way will help to prepare you for your own death and resurrection.