

# Preparing for Life After Death Occurs

By Patricia A. Williams

## ***"Is YOUR house in order?"***

That poignant question begs an answer from every human being. It is a question that Rhonda D. Green, funeral services manager for First Baptist Church of Glenarden, unflinchingly asks.

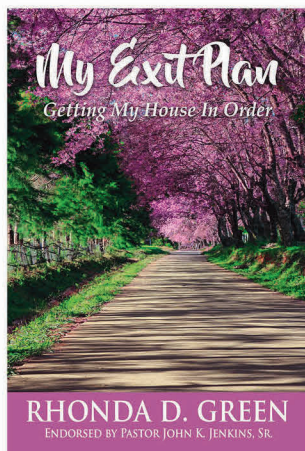
"My Exit Plan: Getting My House in Order" is Rhonda's recently published comprehensive guide. It spells out the process and emphasizes the importance of planning for the inevitable: death. The book uncovers and addresses aspects of end of life/funeral preparation from A to Z; things that would not readily occur to the average person. Furthermore, it offers real life examples in which things notably run smoother when a person has an exit plan, as well as disheartening stories of those caught without one. What a difference there is between a person who has their affairs in order and one who does not.

From a young age, Rhonda had the heart and sensitivity to help people who were grieving. At funerals, she would pass out tissue, wipe the faces of the bereaved and distribute programs. She enjoyed helping people that were grieving to feel better. Rhonda has a special gift and a passion to educate people. Because of her unrivaled knowledge and expertise, she is becoming a sought-after speaker on this topic.

Rhonda is a devoted member of FBCG and has served bereaved families through funerals services since 1998. Her role goes beyond "simply" planning for a funeral. She does not view her assignment as a gloomy task, but as an opportunity to do life together with those within her care. Although faced with coordinating many funerals in any given month, she approaches the often-viewed morbid responsibility with authentic compassion that in itself can console a bereaved family.

Reminiscing on how the book came to be, Rhonda disclosed that in 2011 there were so many funerals at FBCG in which the deceased and/or their families were not prepared. That was frustrating to Rhonda, but it inspired her to compose questions to ask people to ensure that she had everything needed to properly carry out the funeral service. Eventually Rhonda created a workbook, "My Exit Plan." Initially, once completed, the "My Exit Plan Workbook" was





a document that housed vital information required to execute the wishes of a loved one upon their death. This eight-page document was to be filled out and kept with any insurance policies. With God's nudging, Rhonda began to write "the story" of "My Exit Plan."

As she thought about "My Exit Plan," it made her evaluate how funerals were

coordinated at FBCG. When God instructed her to "take it to another level and kick it up a few notches," she started writing things down and putting policies in place. The FBCG Funeral Services Department was birthed from the ideas that God gave Rhonda. She now wanted to write a manual that could show people how to get "their house" (their affairs) in order. Here she shares more about doing so:

*Grace:* Why were you motivated to write "My Exit Plan: Getting My House in Order"?

**Rhonda:** I was motivated to write it because so many families were either losing assets or their families were becoming divided because they didn't have things together. I was just seeing so many things that were not okay. I conduct workshops, but the book will allow me to reach more people. I see a lot of families falling apart. My whole mission is to make people stay on one accord; not have division in the family; and not lose their assets.

*Grace:* What are the three most important things you want your readers to take away?

**Rhonda:**

One, you can't take it with you when you go. Therefore, you have to have your affairs in order.

Two, if you take care of the business of dying now, then you don't have to worry about it later. You can focus on living.

And three, instead of leaving a big mess, you can leave the legacy that you created to pass on to your family by getting your affairs in order, which is what keeps your family together.

*Grace:* How does your book/service tie in with the "Doing Life Together" theme?

**Rhonda:** When I think of "doing life together," I think of teaching, fellowship, being connected and involved. Teaching - is educating families how to get their affairs in order. Fellowship - when a person comes in to talk to me about the death of a loved one, I make it my business to leave them with at least one nugget (of valuable information) that they didn't come there to get, that helps them through the process. Being connected and involved, I've walked families through the opening of estates and what they need to do. In sensitive situations, I've gone to the Register of Wills Office and walked them through completing their accounting. Families need more than just hands-on [support] on the day of the funeral. It's like an end-to-end process.

*Grace:* Why do you think people don't have an exit plan?

**Rhonda:** I think people don't have an exit plan because they are afraid to talk about death. Some people think that if they talk about it, then it's going to happen. Well it's going to happen, but it's just not then and there. It's not going to happen until it's your time.

*Grace:* How can you help take the fear out of preparing for an exit plan?

**Rhonda:** Getting engaged-back to doing life-with your family, your friends, your coworkers and having an "exit plan party." Just get everybody to realize, as you're talking about it, your excitement about getting your affairs in order and it will cause other people to want to get their affairs in order. That way it's not so, "I'm home alone and writing my will."

*Grace:* How do you keep from getting overwhelmed or burdened by the cares of those you serve?

**Rhonda:** I give everything to God because it's not my burden to carry. I pray for the situation and I wait for God to answer. One of the things that I stick with is, [something] my mom told me years ago, "If you're going to worry, why pray and if you're going to pray, why worry?" I just focus on, this is what I do, this is my job, this is my ministry, this is my passion. I'm not going to take the sorrows of the world home with me. I pray for the people and leave it in God's hands.

*Grace:* You say in the book that as much attention to detail should be given to planning for a funeral as for an upscale wedding or other special event. Please speak to that.





*"... take care of the business of dying now, then you don't have to worry about it later."*

~Rhonda D. Green

**Rhonda:** I've coordinated destination weddings as well as weddings in the DMV. And I noticed all the attention people put into preparation in order to make sure they have a wonderful celebration. They often start by preparing way in advance, including having multiple family gatherings to discuss the wedding. When it comes to funerals, I noticed that people will make sure that they have a preacher, someone to sing, a nice program and some good food, but that's about it. I believe that families should get together and talk about what they want for their end of life celebration, just as they do a wedding. Having this type of conversation will allow a person to share their specific wishes and desires and avoid the craziness and division that comes when desires are not known. You hear that weddings and funerals can divide a family; they really can.

*Grace:* What is the most interesting service you have coordinated?

**Rhonda:** That was the homegoing service of Mr. Smile Saint Aubin. That was a real experience for me. Smile worked at the Blair House in Washington, D.C., and was later promoted to the position of White House butler; and he served five presidents. We did the service, we had all of these presidents here at the Ministry Center. It was like, am I really doing this? Pastor Jenkins did the message. It was amazing because I had never done anything of that magnitude. Additionally, we had a memorial service at the White House. I helped pull that together and I took a team of people. After coming back, that was like, WOW.

**A final word from Rhonda:** "Working in this position, I no longer see it as we're just doing funerals; we're ministering to our families, we're doing life with our families. We're helping them to have life after death. I want people to know that there is life after the death of a loved one. A lot of people die emotionally when their loved one dies. God wants you to live until He decides it's time for you to die."

During and after the interview, we discussed several other situations and services, leaving me impressed by her capacity to focus on "doing life together" with families while coordinating the funeral of their loved one. The service and care that Rhonda provides is a tremendous asset to FBCG, and the book is a phenomenal planning tool for families and churches.

For more information, visit [www.myexitplan-mep.com](http://www.myexitplan-mep.com) or email [myexitplan@rhondagreen.org](mailto:myexitplan@rhondagreen.org). The book can be purchased at the My Exit Plan website, FBCG Media Center and on Amazon. The book and workbook will be available in Spanish in the near future.

Shout out to *Grace* Magazine's own, Angela Bell, for designing the "My Exit Plan" book cover and interior layout! *G*



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