

## CATHOLIC TEACHING ON ASSISTED SUICIDE

Because all life is sacred, Catholic teaching holds that assisted suicide can never be permitted.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide stand in contradiction to the Catholic understanding that all life bears God's image and has inherent dignity.

### **Allowing to Die vs. Killing**

Killing is an intentional act that causes death, while allowing to die is withholding or withdrawing futile or burdensome treatments.

**Q.** What's the difference between withholding treatment and assisted suicide?

**A.** Assisted suicide is the intentional taking of life and is never permissible. Withholding "extraordinary means" of medical treatment is morally permissible, allowing nature to take its course and death to occur naturally.

*"[I]t is never licit to kill another: even if [one] should wish it, indeed if [one] request it, hanging between life and death... nor is it licit even when a sick person is no longer able to live."*

St. Augustine

## MAKING GOOD DECISIONS AT THE END OF LIFE

*"Dying is one of the most important moments in our lives. Like all important moments, it deserves thoughtful preparation."*

Father Lawrence Reilly, Ethicist and Theologian

The Church encourages all Catholics to prayerfully reflect on death and to prepare for it responsibly. This may include preparing a living will and durable power of attorney for health care to make their wishes known.

### **The Church wants to help people make good decisions at the end of life.**

The bishops of Washington State encourage all Catholics to make their desires known to their family, friends and doctor regarding initiating or continuing life-sustaining procedures in the event of a terminal condition. Catholics also are encouraged to give power of attorney for health care to someone they trust who can make health care decisions for them, if they are unable to do so for themselves.

For more information about making end of life decisions, visit the Washington State Catholic Conference online at <http://www.thewsc.org/end-of-life-decisions-booklet>.

*"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back again and take you to myself, so that where I am you also may be." (John 14:3)*



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# Respecting life at the end of life

*"I am the resurrection and the life; all who believe in me, even if they die, will live"*

(John. 11:25)

## CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

Scripture and Catholic tradition teach us that death is not an end, but a transition to eternal life with God.

*“Whoever believes has eternal life” (John. 6:47)*

Every living person is created in the image of God. The gift of life is a sacred trust and we are stewards of that trust.

Whether we are healthy or sick, rich or poor, able-bodied or disabled... our life bears the sacred image of God and we have a duty to preserve it.

We have an obligation to nurture and care for our own life and the lives of others. We must never harm or destroy it.

*“Every single person has worth. It doesn't matter what their state in life is, what their disability is, what their intelligence is. By virtue that they are created by God, they have innate dignity.” Karin Dufault, SP, RN, PhD*

## WHAT DOES THE CHURCH TEACH ABOUT THE END OF LIFE

### Making Good Decisions

Medical advances can help save lives. They also can present terminally-ill patients and their loved ones with difficult choices at the end of life.

**Q.** Does the Church require Catholics to pursue all efforts to preserve life?

**A.** No. Human life is a gift from God and we have a duty to preserve it. But we enter into eternal life through death, and the Church teaches that treatments or procedures may be refused if they offer little or no benefit and cause undue burden.

Catholic teaching gives patients and their families principles for making decisions about initiating or continuing medical treatments.

*“But normally one is held to use only ordinary means...according to the circumstances of persons, places, times, and culture – that is to say, means that do not involve any grave burden for oneself or another.” (Pope Pius XII)*

### Ordinary and Extraordinary

Treatments that offer reasonable hope of benefit that may be obtained without excessive pain, expense or burden are considered ordinary means.

Treatments that do not offer reasonable hope of benefit and cannot be obtained without excessive pain, expense or burden are considered extraordinary means.

Respecting the sacredness of life, each person decides the benefits and burdens of treatment according to their own physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health at the time of the decision.

When confronted with highly emotional life-and-death decisions, Catholics should gather all the facts, consult with their physician and family, reflect on Catholic teaching, and pray.

We are called to a fullness of life which far exceeds the dimensions of our earthly existence “...because it consists in sharing the very life of God.” (Pope John Paul II, Evangelium Vitae)

