
What can I do?

Get educated. Maryland Right to Life (mdrtl.org) has resources as does The Dignity Mandate (thedignitymandate.org). Contact your legislators to tell them to vote against legalizing assisted suicide. Spread the word. Comfort, encourage, and aid those who have been given terminal diagnoses. Last but not least, pray.

What about my end-of-life care?

A “Durable Power-of-Attorney for Health Care” is preferred to a Living Will, because Living Wills require you to make tomorrow’s health decisions today when you do not have all the facts. No one would do this with his finances (e.g., “Do this with my money no matter what”). Why do it with our health and lives?

The Patients’ Rights Council (patientsrightscouncil.org) is an excellent resource for information on a “Durable Power-of-Attorney for Health Care.”

The Maryland Catholic Conference has created *Health Care Decision Making for Maryland Catholics* along with other resources to help you consider your wishes in advance.

Even the weakest and most vulnerable, the sick, the old, the unborn, and the poor are Masterpieces of God’s Creation, made in His own image, destined to live forever, and deserving of the utmost reverence and respect.

—Pope Francis, July 7, 2013

Eight Principles for End-of-Life Care that respect our most basic God-given right: the right to life.

1. We do not have the right to take our own lives, nor to directly bring about the death of any innocent person.
2. Each of us is obliged to use “ordinary” means to preserve his life, notably those that provide a reasonable hope of benefit.
3. No patient is obliged to accept or demand useless or “extraordinary” medical interventions.
4. The human person always has dignity, even in suffering. A person is never a vegetable.
5. Even when we cannot cure, we can care.
6. Food and water are required unless it is futile, or death is imminent. Food and water are rights, not medicine, and therefore must not be withheld.
7. Patients in end-stage conditions or a persistent unconscious state possess dignity and deserve good care.
8. Preparation for death can be a beautiful time to reconcile with family, friends, and God.

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Did You Know?

There are efforts in Maryland to legalize assisted suicide. This would allow a physician to prescribe a deadly dose of medicine for a patient with a terminal illness. The patient fills the prescription and takes the lethal drug on his own when he desires.

Supporters of assisted suicide like to call it “death with dignity” or “medical aid-in-dying,” but is it?

Scripture has made it very clear with the Fifth Commandment, *Thou Shalt Not Kill*, that human life is not ours for the taking. That right belongs to God alone. Throughout the centuries, the Catholic Church has reinforced this basic teaching. A few examples are:

Saint Augustine of Hippo

It is never licit to kill another: even if he should wish it, indeed if he requests it because, hanging between life and death, he begs for help in freeing the soul struggling against the bonds of the body and longing to be released; nor is it licit even when a sick person is no longer able to live.

Catechism of the Catholic Church

—Suicide is seriously contrary to justice, hope, and charity. It is against the Fifth Commandment.

—Voluntary cooperation in suicide is contrary to the moral law.

Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)

—Suicide is always as morally objectionable as murder. The Church's tradition has always rejected it as a gravely evil choice.

—To concur with the intention of another person to commit suicide and to help in carrying it out through "assisted suicide" means to cooperate in, and at times to be the actual perpetrator of, an injustice which can never be excused, even if it is requested.

Not only does the Catholic Church believe this but other religions do as well. The Position Paper of the Abrahamic Monotheistic Religions on Matters Concerning the End of Life says euthanasia and assisted suicide “fundamentally contradict the inalienable value of human life, and therefore are inherently and consequently morally and religiously wrong and should be forbidden without exceptions.”

As Catholics we are blessed to have a cloud of witnesses to show us what real death with dignity looks like and how to medically and spiritually aid those who are dying. Think of Mother Teresa, who picked up the destitute and dying off the streets of Kolkata and showed them the dignity and care they deserved as human beings, or of Saint Jeanne Jugan, foundress of the Little Sisters of the Poor, who gave the poor elderly a home. Saint Camillus started an order to care for those in hospitals after he himself was in a hospital and saw the needs of his fellow patients. An American Servant of God Rose Hawthorne Lathrop started an order to care especially for cancer patients, while Saint Damien of Molokai spent his priestly ministry caring for those with leprosy.

These are just a few examples of saints whose path to God included caring for those near death. As all the saints show, the root of dignity is knowing that we have been made in the image and likeness of God and that through Baptism we are children of God. We may not be called to be a Mother Teresa or a Saint Damien, but we are called to show the world what dignity really is.

How do I show dignity to others?

To show dignity to a person, we must act like Christ and treat the person like Christ.

Some Simple Guidelines:

† No one—including the patient, family members, medical professionals, members of the clergy, government officials, or insurance agencies—*ever has the right to decide that a patient's life is useless or a burden*. Respect for human dignity forbids any act or omission intended to end life.

† Palliative care and hospice care are programs that include pain and symptom management as well as comfort and holistic care. If operated according to Catholic ethical principals, they provide acceptable end-of-life care.

† Our Faith enables us to see suffering as an opportunity to share in Christ's redemptive suffering. We can offer our pain and even fear to God on behalf of others. As believers, we reach out in love to aid those who are suffering because we see Christ in them.

† As Christians, it is our duty and privilege to care for the dying. We must never abandon or be indifferent to those who are suffering. We should ease their physical, emotional, and spiritual suffering by offering love, support, and companionship. Dying should be a grace-filled time reflecting our Christian hope in the life to come.

Incidentally, people who ask for death are often seeking help and love, not euthanasia. No person should ever feel that the world would be better without his presence.