

Living With Hope ... Confronting Our Fears

A series on death and dying: The Catholic Perspective

Questions & Answers Regarding Assisted Suicide & Euthanasia

What is euthanasia?

Euthanasia is a direct action or omission of an action-which is *intended* to cause death and so eliminate suffering. Euthanasia is unnecessary as well as wrong because suffering and pain can be relieved in many morally acceptable ways.

What is assisted suicide?

Assisted Suicide occurs when a physician, family member or some other person aids one in a voluntary decision for death and helps carry out these explicit wishes at the behest of the person who is choosing death.

To concur with such intention of another person and to help in carrying it out, even if requested, means to cooperate in and at times to be the actual perpetrator of a gravely immoral act- a "perversion of mercy." True compassion leads to sharing another's pain; it does not kill the person. (See *Evangelium Vitae* par. 66).



Should not people be free to decide for themselves if they wish to die?

The decision "to be or not to be" is not ours to make. The life of an individual is, first of all, God's; we are the recipients and stewards of this great gift. God gives us the freedom to choose how to use our gift of life. We make day-to-day decisions with regard to health and safety, but only within certain limits.

I would not want to stand in the way of someone else's choice. Are not we Catholics trying to "legislate" morality?

The issues of euthanasia and assisted suicide involve the taking of human life, which makes them "human rights" issues. This is a legitimate area for pursuing public consensus. The Church calls each of us to defend and protect human life, especially the lives of the most vulnerable. Laws should reflect such a view, and promote ways to care for dying persons without allowing the direct and intentional taking of life. (See *Faithful Citizenship: Civic Responsibility for a New Millennium*, NCCB, 1999).

I want to "die with dignity". What kinds of treatment can I refuse?

Some life-supporting interventions are not morally obligatory. We have the right and responsibility to determine whether a particular means of treatment is "ordinary" or "extraordinary" care. If the care is "ordinary", then it must be employed. If it is not, in consultation with the physician, we may decide to undergo it or to forego it.

Concern for the dignity of each person -especially the most vulnerable members of society - is the foundation of our opposition to the legalization of euthanasia and/or assisted suicide.

(Hopes & Fears, Catholic Bishops of Ohio)

**For More Information
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