

A BETTER WAY FORWARD

A Message on Assisted Suicide from the Catholic Bishops of Illinois

April 2024

Legislation has been introduced to legalize assisted suicide in Illinois. SB 3499 makes it legal for a physician to prescribe an array of lethal drugs to a person diagnosed with a terminal disease who requests to end his or her life. The Catholic Bishops of Illinois oppose this legislation; there is a better way forward for our state.

As Pope Francis underscores, “We must accompany people towards death, but not provide death or facilitate assisted suicide.”

Assisted suicide disregards the Hippocratic Oath, “Do No Harm,” and sends the wrong message about the role of medical professionals. We cannot say it any better than the American Medical Association, “Physician assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician’s role as healer, would be difficult or impossible to control, and would provide serious societal risks.”

This legislation brings a range of possible abuses. It should alarm us that in states with legalized assisted suicide there are documented cases of people being offered inexpensive lethal drugs to end their life rather than being provided more costly treatment. The poor and those with disabilities are particularly in jeopardy because they are the most vulnerable to abuses. Every major national organization that represents people with disabilities is opposed to assisted suicide.

In Oregon, where assisted suicide has been legal since 1997, data show that pain is not among the top five reasons why a person wants to end their life. Loss of autonomy, feelings of being a burden and being less able to engage in activities that make life enjoyable are most often cited as reasons for choosing assisted suicide. A better way forward is to expand mental health coverage and strengthen social supports such as community programs to help those dealing with depression and feelings of hopelessness.

No one wants to suffer or experience a loved one’s suffering. Fortunately, there are effective ways to alleviate suffering or make a person more comfortable at the end of life through palliative care. This relatively new specialty area of medicine cares for the whole person – physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually – to relieve symptoms and stress that often accompany serious illness or side effects of treatment. A better way forward is to expand the number of palliative care locations and services in all areas of Illinois.

Assisted suicide is not a compassionate solution for those who are suffering. There is a better way forward that truly offers compassionate care and compassionate choices. Please go to www.ilcatholic.org or call 217-528-9200 to find out how to contact your local elected official to tell them to vote NO on SB 3499.

Frequently Asked Questions on the Issue of Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide

Q • Does this mean that I am left to suffer endlessly?

A • Not at all. No one is obligated to take on treatments which will only extend life but do not offer hope of recovery; ie, it is not necessary to live as long as one possibly can by whatever means necessary. There is great moral difference between acknowledging the reality of approaching death and intending to hasten it. One may refuse treatments which are deemed to be “disproportionate” in that they do not offer plausible hope for recovery, or more burdensome than beneficial to the patient. One may receive medications to deal with pain, even if they have a harmful effect or may hasten death, so long as this is not the intention of the patient nor the caregivers.

Q • Why does the Church care?

A • The Church has accompanied believers in Christ through many eras and cultures. She offers more to care for the sick and needy than any other institution. She is a witness to those aspects of culture which respect the value of life and those which cheapen it. Actions which intentionally shorten life, even in the midst of suffering, cheapen human dignity and lead to a culture where some life is treated as having more value than others. When euthanasia is accepted and practiced, it casts a shadow over the lives of those who endure handicaps, are elderly or infirm. When public policy endorses the intentional ending of life when its end is near, it creates the expectation that life should not include suffering. The false idea can easily lead to the reduction or withholding of care for those who depend upon financial aid and whose lives no longer seem “useful” from an economic standpoint. There is evidence that economic considerations have played a role in the decision-making process that governs euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide.

Q • What does the Church teach on this matter?

A • The Church has consistently taught that our life is a gift of God and its dignity is to be respected from the moment of our conception to our natural death. In each person’s life, the mystery of health and sickness, joy and suffering co-exist. While the practice of medicine which seeks to heal and alleviate suffering is a great vocation and work of mercy, the alleviation of suffering may never be confused with the elimination of the suffering person. Truly wholistic care for a patient and loved one should include the emotional and spiritual care to adequately address their pain and to accompany them through the last chapter of life, through death into eternal life.

Q • Isn’t Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide presented as being compassionate?

A • Though some advocate allowing for assisted suicide as a more compassionate approach to the struggle of facing death, the word “compassionate” is literally translated as - “to suffer with.” Assisted suicide is the exact opposite of “suffering with;” it is the removal of the suffering person from our midst.

Frequently Asked Questions on the Issue of Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide (cont.)

Often, a terminally ill patient faces the great suffering of being alone or the guilt of feeling burdensome to loved ones. This person's dignity as a child of God and fellow member of the human family should be affirmed, and we should be willing to truly be compassionate, willing to suffer with and support one another in these most difficult moments. Very often, when a suffering person's pain can be managed and when their spiritual and emotional struggles are acknowledged, their fear of death and desire to hasten their death subsides.

Q • What can I do to ensure I am cared for according to my intentions?

A • Having a designated family member or proxy for making decisions of a medical nature should you be indisposed is a helpful way to assure that you receive the treatments and care you need, but also that your life need not be unnecessarily extended. Catholic hospitals and institutions adhere to the "Ethical and Religious Directives" authored by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. These clarify that ordinary means of care and treatment are expected, (such as nutrition and hydration as long as they can be accepted), but means which are unduly burdensome or futile need not be taken on, and that under no circumstances is your death to be intentionally hastened. Providing this link to your proxy or including it with your living will can and will help clarify your intentions.

“Did You Know?” Tidbits on Assisted Suicide for Flocknotes/Bulletin Inserts

WHAT HAPPENS WITH ASSISTED SUICIDE?

A doctor prescribes lethal drugs that can be sent through the mail to a person wishing to end his or her life if diagnosed with a terminal illness. There is no requirement that a doctor or anyone be present with a person in case something would go wrong upon consumption of the drugs. The person may take hours to die. Assisted suicide is not dignified, it is deadly. Tell your state legislators: **Vote NO on SB 3499** - assisted suicide. Visit www.ilcatholic.org for additional information and resources.

ILLINOIS RESIDENTS DESERVE EXCELLENT PAIN MANAGEMENT, NOT ASSISTED SUICIDE

Illinois has excellent, modern palliative care programs to alleviate suffering - no one's pain should be unmanageable in our state. Hospice care is paid for by Medicare, Medicaid, and private insurance. We deserve the best in pain management and quality care, not suicide drugs. Tell your state legislators to **Vote NO on SB 3499** - assisted suicide. Visit www.ilcatholic.org for additional information and resources.

ASSISTED SUICIDE INCENTIVIZES DENYING TREATMENT

Insurance companies have turned down coverage for cancer treatment but offered to pay for suicide drugs instead. Furthermore, the disabled community already faces demoralization and oppression in seeking adequate medical care. Assisted suicide encourages this kind of prejudice. Access Living, Progress Center for Independent Living and the National Council on Disability oppose assisted suicide. People need quality medical care and treatment, not assisted suicide. Tell your state legislators to **Vote NO on SB 3499**- assisted suicide. Visit www.ilcatholic.org for additional information and resources.

ASSISTED SUICIDE TARGETS THOSE WITH MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES

The proposal pending in Illinois does not require a psychiatric evaluation for depression. Many people requesting assisted suicide are depressed. The lifetime risk of suicide among patients with untreated depressive disorder is nearly 20% and 75.94% of communities in Illinois did not have enough mental health providers to serve residents in 2021, according to federal guidelines. Thinking about suicide can be a common part of depression, rather than a rational choice. Tell your state legislators to **Vote NO on SB 3499** - assisted suicide. Visit www.ilcatholic.org for additional information and resources.

ASSISTED SUICIDE SENDS A MESSAGE TO PEOPLE THAT THEY ARE BURDENSOME

In Oregon, where assisted suicide has been legal for years, data shows people request suicide drugs not for pain but because they cannot do the same activities that they could before, such as control bodily functions. They feel they've lost dignity or that they are a burden. Assisted suicide can also promote the view that elderly relatives are not persons to be loved but burdens to be managed. Suicide drugs are not the answer. Everyone deserves loving, supportive care, affirmation of their dignity, and to know that they are never a burden. Tell your state legislators to **Vote NO on SB 3499** - assisted suicide. Visit www.ilcatholic.org for additional information and resources.

“Did You Know?” Tidbits on Assisted Suicide for Flocknotes/Bulletin Inserts (cont.)

DOCTORS OPPOSE ASSISTED SUICIDE

The American Medical Association (AMA), American Psychiatric Association, and dozens of other medical groups oppose assisted suicide. The AMA says “Physician-assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician’s role as healer.” Physicians are entrusted with saving lives, not ending them, and assisted suicide violates the Hippocratic Oath. Tell your state legislators to **Vote NO on SB 3499** - assisted suicide. Visit www.ilcatholic.org for additional information and resources.

PRAYER FOR HELP



A PRAYER FOR HELP

Lord Jesus Christ, you chose to share our human nature and redeem all people.

We ask your help for our brothers and sisters who are ill. Support them with your power and shelter them from sadness. Keep them firm in faith and serene in hope. Also help those who assist the sick and care for them in their time of illness.

Inspire our society to resist the temptation of assisted suicide for the elderly, the sick, the vulnerable and all your people. May life's beauty and sanctity be respected among all our brothers and sisters. All this we ask in your holy name.

Amen.

NOVENA to Saint John Paul II

for life and against assisted suicide in Illinois

ABOUT THE NOVENA

This novena, nine days of intercessory prayer, can be prayed starting anytime to urge the defeat assisted suicide legislation in Illinois. We pray for a commitment by our elected officials to prioritize palliative care and support for those at risk from a physician assisted suicide: those with disabilities, who are nearing the end of life, or are struggling with a mental illness. We pray to Saint John Paul II, who showed us the value of human life through his own struggles and faith.

NOVENA

START THE NOVENA WITH THIS PRAYER EACH DAY

Merciful God, we pray with thanks and gratitude for the great spiritual gift of Saint John Paul II's apostolic life and mission.

Through his heavenly intercession we ask for the defeat of the assisted suicide bill and that the infinite worth of each human person is upheld through proper investment in palliative care.

Grant also that we may grow in love for You and proclaim boldly the love of Jesus Christ to all people. Through Christ, Our Lord. Amen.

DAILY QUOTE/REFLECTION:

Read the day's quote or reflection (on the next page)

CONCLUDE THE NOVENA EACH DAY WITH THESE PRAYERS:

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.
Thy kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth,
as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily
bread, and forgive us
trespasses, as we forgive
those who trespass against
us, and lead us not into
temptation, but deliver us
from evil.
Amen.

HAIL MARY

Hail, Mary, full of grace, the
Lord is with thee.
Blessed art thou among
women and blessed is the
fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God,
pray for us sinners, now and
at the hour of our death.
Amen.

GLORY BE TO THE FATHER

Glory be to the Father and to
the Son and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning is
now, and ever shall be world
without end.
Amen.

NOVENA TO SAINT JOHN PAUL II - DAY ONE

All life has “inestimable value” - “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 2013

NOVENA DAY TWO

“A society lacks solid foundations when, on the one hand, it asserts values such as the dignity of the person, justice and peace, but then, on the other hand, radically acts to the contrary by allowing or tolerating a variety of ways in which human life is devalued and violated, especially where it is weak or marginalized. Only respect for life can be the foundation and guarantee of the most precious and essential goods of society, such as democracy and peace.”
- *Evangelium Vitae*, 101

NOVENA DAY THREE

“A society will be judged on the basis of how it treats its weakest members; and among the most vulnerable are surely the unborn and the dying.”
- Pope Saint John Paul II, May 2000

NOVENA DAY FOUR

“Respecting the dignity of people who are dying must involve respecting their lives, for without life there is no dignity.”
- *Cherishing Life, Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales, 2004*

NOVENA DAY FIVE

“Laws which legitimize the direct killing of innocent human beings through abortion or assisted suicide are in complete opposition to the inviolable right to life proper to every individual; they thus deny the equality of everyone before the law.”
- *Evangelium Vitae*, 72

NOVENA DAY SIX

“As believers, how can we fail to see that abortion and assisted suicide are a terrible rejection of God’s gift of life and love? And as believers, how can we fail to feel the duty to surround the sick and those in distress with the warmth of our affection and the support that will help them always to embrace life?”
- Pope Saint John Paul II, 1999

NOVENA DAY SEVEN

“Fragility, pain and illness are a difficult trial for everyone...they are an appeal for patience, for suffering- with; we cannot give in to: temptation to apply quick and drastic solutions, stirred by false compassion or by simple criteria of efficiency and economic saving...True compassion marginalizes no one...much less consider their death as a good thing.”
- Pope Francis, June 2016

NOVENA DAY EIGHT

“We deserve to grow old in a society that views our cares and needs with a compassion grounded in respect, offering genuine support in our final days. The choices we make together now will decide whether this is the kind of caring society we will leave to future generations.”
- *To Live Each Day with Dignity, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2011*

NOVENA DAY NINE

“Never tire of firmly speaking out in defense of life from its conception and do not be deterred from the commitment to defend the dignity of every human person with courageous determination. Christ is with you: be not afraid!”
- Pope Saint John Paul II, 2001

Webinar on Assisted Suicide

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J7bXytwC6c&t=9s>



Press Conference from March 2024 from Advocates Against Assisted Suicide:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BrQH1YzTuPA&t=1470s>





Join the Illinois Catholic Advocacy Network (I-CAN)

Our state's General Assembly creates laws that affect us, our Church, families and vulnerable neighbors. Put your faith into action with the Illinois Catholic Advocacy Network (I-CAN). Stay informed and join your voice with Catholics statewide on critical issues. Members get action alerts on issues along with updates from the Catholic Conference of Illinois:

<https://www.ilcatholic.org/take-action/join-i-can/>