

Talking Points for Priests/lay leaders on Assisted Suicide

- Illinois' new assisted suicide law, which goes into effect Sept. 12, presents Catholics with an important moral and pastoral challenge.
 - Many people hear phrases like "death with dignity" or "compassionate choice" and assume the issue is simply about relieving pain.
 - As Catholics, we must respond with both truth and compassion: The Church does not ignore suffering, the Church walks with people through suffering.
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First: The dangers of assisted suicide in practice

- Assisted suicide is often presented as peaceful, but documented cases in other states have involved prolonged distress, choking, vomiting, and painful deaths.
 - Illinois' law is available to those 18 and older, who are terminally ill, and have a prognosis of six months or less to live.
 - It does not require a doctor or medical professional to be present when lethal drugs are taken.
 - There are also no reliable safeguards against pressure, coercion, or misuse of the drugs by others.
 - The law also doesn't require any services to be offered to the person requesting death.
 - Many people requesting assisted suicide struggle with depression, fear, loneliness, or feeling like a burden, yet Illinois does not require mandatory psychiatric evaluations.
 - Prognoses can be wrong. Some patients given "six months to live," instead survive for years.
 - The American Medical Association and many major medical organizations oppose assisted suicide because it contradicts the physician's role as healer.
 - Assisted suicide creates dangerous healthcare incentives, especially when insurance companies can deny treatment, only covering life-ending drugs, as has already been documented in other states.
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Human dignity never disappears

- One of the most important truths we must remember is that human dignity does not depend on health, independence, productivity, or control.
 - Every person is made in the image and likeness of God.
 - The danger of assisted suicide is that it teaches society that some lives are no longer worth living.
 - The vulnerable — especially the elderly, disabled, and depressed — are always most at risk when that mindset takes hold.
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Compassion means "to suffer with"

- The word compassion literally means "to suffer with." Jesus did not abandon suffering people. He entered into their suffering and remained with them.
- Many people who request assisted suicide are expressing fear: fear of pain, loneliness, dependence, or being a burden.
- Those fears are real, but the answer is not to end the person's life. The answer is love, presence, care, and accompaniment.
- True compassion never eliminates the sufferer - it walks with the suffering person.

The Church supports real end-of-life care

- The Church strongly supports palliative care and hospice care.
- Catholics are not required to pursue every possible medical treatment at all costs.
- There is a moral difference between allowing natural death and intentionally causing death.
- A person may refuse burdensome or disproportionate treatment when there is little hope of recovery.
- At the same time, the Church encourages pain management, emotional support, spiritual care, and the sacraments.
- Palliative care helps people live with dignity until natural death while surrounding them with support.

Assisted suicide changes the culture

- Once suicide becomes accepted as “medicine,” it changes relationships between doctors and patients.
- Physicians are meant to heal and accompany, not intentionally help end life.
- We also know that many people who struggle with suicidal thoughts are experiencing depression, fear, or hopelessness.
- As a society, we work to prevent suicide in almost every other circumstance.
- We should not redefine suicide as compassionate simply because someone is sick or elderly.

Suffering is not meaningless in Christ

- The Christian faith does not deny suffering, but neither does it see suffering as meaningless.
- Christ Himself entered into human suffering on the Cross.
- Even during serious illness, there can be moments of grace, reconciliation, forgiveness, prayer, and deep love within families. Human life remains sacred and meaningful, even in weakness and suffering.

Catholics should prepare before crisis comes

- Catholics should discuss end-of-life wishes with loved ones before a medical crisis occurs.
- Families should choose trusted healthcare proxies and ensure decisions reflect Catholic teaching.
- We should also remember the importance of the sacraments near the end of life: Confession, Anointing of the Sick, and holy Communion.
- No Catholic should face death alone or without spiritual care.

What to do when someone expresses a terminal diagnosis?

- Help them get proper pain management, perhaps hospice or palliative care, to make sure they are never alone. Encourage them to reach out to their clergy and parish, especially if they have not been close before. The Church has walked with people for her whole 2000-year history.

Conclusion

- At the heart of this issue is a simple question: Do we respond to suffering by eliminating the sufferer, or by accompanying one another in love?
- The Catholic answer is clear. Every human life is sacred. True compassion does not help people die.
- True compassion helps people live — and reminds them they are loved — until God calls them home.