

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

As Catholics, we believe that God is the author of all life. We also recognize the sacredness of human life from the moment of conception to natural death.

For many years the Bishops of Pennsylvania have provided information to the Faithful about medical treatment at the end of life and have encouraged the use of advance directives for health care. Such a document enables a person to give guidance to another who will make decisions about medical treatment or care.

Changes in Pennsylvania law have prompted us to develop questions and answers about authoritative Church teachings on end-of-life issues and to prepare an advance directive for health care for Catholics. By completing a document that is consistent with official Catholic teaching, you are led to consider circumstances that involve medical treatment and care, and to share your beliefs and wishes with others. This document will assist those who will need to make decisions for you when you cannot direct your own care. By taking this step, you can eliminate misunderstanding and confusion and appoint someone who will act for you.

These materials set forth the Catholic principles that apply to medical treatment decision-making, explain the combined living will and a health care power of attorney documents and include a form which is consistent with both Pennsylvania law and authoritative Catholic teaching including certain core principles:

- We believe that we have a responsibility to preserve our life. Euthanasia, which is an act or omission which of itself or by intention causes death, and/or assisted suicide is morally wrong. (Declaration on Euthanasia: Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1980)
- We believe there are some limited qualifications to the obligation to attempt to preserve life such as the refusal of overzealous treatment, including medical procedures that are burdensome, dangerous, extraordinary, or disproportionate to the expected outcome. (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995, #2278)
- Death is not to be feared as the end of our existence, rather it is the doorway to our eternal destiny.
- A decision to forego a medical treatment should not be made because a person's life is judged as not meaningful.
- "There should be a presumption in favor of providing nutrition and hydration to all patients, including patients who require medically assisted nutrition and hydration, as long as this is of sufficient benefit to outweigh the burdens involved to the patient." (The Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services, 2001, #56.)

We pray that you find this booklet to be of help as you consider the important issues covered.

We pray, too, that you make decisions relying on your Faith and knowing that life eternal awaits.

Yours in Christ,

The Catholic Bishops of Pennsylvania



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