



To Live Each Day with Dignity:

Bulletin on Physician-Assisted Suicide from the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops on July 16, 2011 release a statement entitled, “To Live Each Day with Dignity: A Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide.” The full text of the statement is available at www.usccb.org/toliveeachday. Below are some highlights from the statement.

“Respect for life does not demand that we attempt to prolong life by using medical treatments that are ineffective or unduly burdensome. Nor does it mean we should deprive suffering patients of needed pain medications out of a misplaced or exaggerated fear that they might have the side effect of shortening life. The risk of such an effect is extremely low when pain medication is adjusted to a patient’s level of pain, with the laudable purpose of simply addressing that pain (CCC, no. 2279). In fact, severe pain can shorten life, while effective palliative care can enhance the length as well as the quality of a person’s life. It can even alleviate the fears and problems that lead some patients to the desperation of considering suicide.

Effective palliative care also allows patients to devote their attention to the unfinished business of their lives, to arrive at a sense of peace with God, with loved ones, and with themselves. No one should dismiss this time as useless or meaningless. Learning how to face this last stage of our earthly lives is one of the most important and meaningful things each of us will do, and caregivers who help people through this process are also doing enormously important work. As Christians we believe that even suffering itself need not be meaningless—for as Pope John Paul II showed during his final illness, suffering accepted in love can bring us closer to the mystery of Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of others.”

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