

What Can I Do?

- Join FLCAN, the Florida Catholic Advocacy Network, at www.flaccb.org and receive updates and alerts.
- Find out who your legislators are and make your voice heard.
- Attend Catholic Days at the Capitol for a briefing on current legislative issues and meet with legislators.
- Contact your diocesan respect life office to find out how you can assist in responding to this concern.
- Join or help start a ministry to the sick and home bound at your parish or local hospital.
- Host an end-of-life planning seminar at your parish. Resources are available through the FCCB.
- Join or coordinate prayer vigils to protect life.
- Pray for those who end their lives through suicide and their families, for persons contemplating it, and for protection against it.

Scripture on Which to Reflect

“You shall not kill.” (Exodus 20: 13)

“Do not court death by your erring way of life, nor draw to yourselves destruction by the works of your hands. Because God did not make death, nor does he rejoice in the destruction of the living.” (Wisdom 1: 12-13)

Prayer for the Elderly

Grant, O Lord of life,
That we may savor every season of our lives
as a gift filled with promise for the future.
Grant that we may lovingly accept your will, and
place ourselves each day in your merciful hands.

And when the moment
of our definitive “passage” comes,
grant that we may face it with serenity,
without regret for what we shall leave behind.

For in meeting you,
after having sought you for so long,
we shall find once more every authentic good
which we have known here on earth,
in the company of all who have gone before us
marked with the sign of faith and hope.

Mary, Mother of pilgrim humanity,
pray for us “now and at the hour of our death.”
Keep us ever close to Jesus, your beloved Son and
our brother, the Lord of life and glory. Amen!

- Saint Pope John Paul II, 1999

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Culture of Life Series

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**This brochure and others in the Culture of Life
Series are available to view and print at:**
www.flaccb.org/culture-of-life.

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*“I came so that they might
have life and have it more
abundantly ...”*

John 10:10

Assisted Suicide:
A Catholic Response

Longstanding Prohibition in Florida

To live in a manner worthy of our human dignity, and to spend our final days on this earth in peace and comfort, surrounded by loved ones—that is the hope of each of us.

Today, however, many people fear the dying process. They are afraid of being kept alive past life's natural limits. They fear experiencing intolerable pain and suffering. They worry about being abandoned or becoming a burden on others.

Today there is a campaign to respond to these fears and needs in a radically different and tragic way. It uses terms like “death with dignity” to describe a self-inflicted death using a drug overdose prescribed by a doctor for the purpose of suicide.

While lawmakers around the country since 1994 have widely rejected these proposals, the topic has recently resurfaced with new momentum. It is important to understand why assisted suicide is wrong.

Catholics should be leaders in the effort to defend and uphold the principle that each of us has a right to live with dignity throughout every day of our lives.

Assisted Suicide: An Introduction

While Florida law prohibits assisted suicide, the so-called “Death with Dignity” movement has targeted Florida as a priority state to change our laws to allow a patient to actively end his or her life.

Florida law imposes criminal responsibility on those who assist others in committing suicide. Section 782.08, Florida Statutes, which was first enacted in 1868, provides in pertinent part that “every person deliberately assisting another in the commission of self murder shall be guilty of manslaughter.”

The Florida Supreme Court upheld this prohibition in *Krischer v. McIver* (1997). In *Krischer*, a patient with a terminal condition sought a lethal dose of drugs from his doctor to end his life. The Court determined that the state's interest in preserving life, preventing suicide and upholding the integrity of the medical profession outweighed the patient's privacy rights.

Objections to Assisted Suicide

Deadly mix: Assisted suicide is far less expensive than palliative and supportive care at the end of life. As insurance companies and governments seek to reduce health care spending, this option may be promoted in order to reduce expense and liability.

Abuse and coercion: Assisted suicide empowers others—family members, health care providers, insurance companies—to pressure and exploit older, weaker, vulnerable persons. Many assisted suicide laws offer no protections from abuse or coercion turning the “right to die” into the “duty to die”.

Terminal diagnoses are often wrong: Diagnoses of terminal illness are based on statistical averages and are often wrong, leading people to give up on treatment and lose good years of their lives.

Discriminates against people with disabilities: Patients with a terminal illness often become disabled as their disease progresses. Others may come to devalue their lives and see them as having less quality. While others receive suicide prevention services, these persons will be offered suicide assistance.

Violates a doctor's role as healer: Assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the physician's role as a healer. It undermines the bond of trust between doctors and their patients, altering that relationship forever. The way a doctor responds to a patient has a profound effect on the patient's self-understanding and sense of self-worth. Patients deserve doctors who will support them through their illness, not offer them suicide.

Lack of psychological screening: Most state assisted suicide proposals do not require screening or counseling for depression. Patients who receive a terminal diagnosis have to deal with stress and turmoil that can lead to a depressive episode. Also, people with a history of depression and suicide attempts could qualify for assisted suicide.

Sends the wrong message about suicide: Our society spends millions each year to prevent suicides with anti-bullying campaign in schools, awareness training in our correctional facilities, toll-free hotlines and extra safety precautions on our bridges. Legalizing assisted suicide would undermine these efforts as studies have shown that it can actually lead to an increase in overall suicide rates.

What the Catholic Church Teaches

“Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable. Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 2279)

“Euthanasia is an action or omission that of itself or by intention causes death in order to alleviate suffering. Catholic health care institutions may never condone or participate in euthanasia or assisted suicide in any way. Dying patients who request euthanasia should receive loving care, psychological and spiritual support, and appropriate remedies for pain and other symptoms so that they can live with dignity until the time of natural death.” (*Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, No. 60)

“Life is the most basic gift of a loving God, “a sacred trust over which we can claim stewardship, but not absolute dominion. Therefore, the Church condemns all attacks on life at any of its stages, including murder, euthanasia, and willful suicide. It matters not whether death results from an affirmative act or a deliberate omission intended to cause death. These prohibitions against murder, euthanasia, suicide and assisted suicide are based on the inherent dignity and fundamental value of each human being, and thus cannot be rejected on the grounds of political pluralism or religious freedom.” (*Life, Death and Treatment of Dying Patients, Statement of Catholic Bishops of Florida*, April 1989)

“...it is never licit to kill another: even if he should wish it, indeed if he request it because, hanging between life and death, he begs for help in freeing the soul struggling against the bonds of the body and longing to be released; nor is it licit even when a sick person is no longer able to live.” (St. Augustine, Ep. 204, 5: CSEL 57, 320)

“To concur with the intention of another person to commit suicide and to help in carrying it out through so-called ‘assisted suicide’ means to cooperate in, and at times to be the actual perpetrator of, an injustice which can never be excused, even if it is requested.” (St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 66)