

A Catholic Vision of Life and Death

As Catholics we believe that life, all of it, from conception to natural death is a gift from God. It is a false illusion to think that we have control over every aspect of our lives. That you are a *steward* of your own life does not mean that you are the author of it. We did not choose our parents, or to become human for that matter. Few of us will have chosen to become Canadians during the course of our lives. None of us, given the choice, would ask to suffer, or have a debilitating disease, and yet, it happens. All of this is part of life as we know it. While for many, this becomes truly apparent when they become sick or elderly, the fact that we are not entirely in control of every aspect of our lives is an opportunity to grow in our love for God, and for all those who have given the gift of love to us. While the Church does not teach that suffering is a good thing, it does teach that your life is beautiful.

We believe that all forms of euthanasia and physician assisted suicide are morally wrong; they are both equally sinful. As the People of God it is our most sacred duty to protect and serve those who are sick, and it is our belief that medicine must serve the dignity of life no matter how vulnerable it is. The Catholic approach to healthcare is focused on alleviating suffering, and on providing care and support – mind, body, and soul – to those who are dying, and to those who care for them.

“Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

The question for many is, quite literally, “When should I pull the plug?” The key to answering the question from a Catholic point view is *intention*. Many forms of treatment, though they may prolong life, are considered *disproportionate*; they cannot cure you or your loved one of the disease that, without this treatment, will cause death. “Pulling the plug” is not the same as euthanasia or suicide because, it is the disease that causes death not an injection or a pill.

While it is quite normal to fear death, what most people actually fear is that they will be alone in this journey. As Catholics we believe that you should not die alone because, quite frankly, you should not live alone. As human beings we are made to be in *communion* with one another, this is true for every moment of our lives. The journey through suffering and into death can, and should be, an opportunity to truly speak our peace, to tell our loved ones how grateful we are for them, and to look forward with hope to our final home in God. Death for Catholics is neither the end, nor the silencing of despair; it is, simply, another prayerful step in the journey of life.

More Resources

Catholic Health Alliance of Canada Publication: *A Catholic Perspective on Health Decisions and Care at End of Life* <http://www.chac.ca/homepage/Catholic%20Perspective.pdf>

Catholic Organization for Life and Family Publication: *Living, Suffering and Dying...What For?* <http://www.colf.ca/index.php/en/publications/item/83-living-suffering-and-dyingwhat-for>

Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton <http://www.caedm.ca/life.aspx>
Palliative care link here