

## Talking Points on Assisted Suicide Legislation

- There is a clear difference between allowing someone to die a natural death and hastening the moment of death. The Catholic Church does not teach that life must be preserved by any and all means. Extraordinary means are not necessary when death is near; people must be allowed to die naturally. But we can't intentionally take their lives or help them to intentionally hasten their death. (The NYS Catholic Conference has a new website and video to inform Catholics of our teachings about the end of life. [www.CatholicEndofLife.org](http://www.CatholicEndofLife.org))
- The term "death with dignity" is insulting and biased. There is nothing remotely undignified about the natural process of death. Every human life has inherent dignity, and death is a part of every human life. Death is not a "choice." Death is a certainty.
- This is a dangerous movement. New York State rightly spends millions of dollars every year in efforts to combat suicide. If you cross any major bridge in this region, you will see a sign that says "Life Is Worth Living." We have anti-bullying campaigns and suicide hotlines, all to prevent suicide. And now we're turning around and saying, "Well, *some* lives are not worth living." This double standard is based entirely on disability, as patients fear "losing autonomy" or "being a burden" due to their disabilities.
- If we legalize assisted suicide, the pressure on people to end their lives will dramatically rise. People with terminal illnesses will feel as though they need to "get out of the way" and not drain financial resources. They will inevitably get pressure, subtle or not so subtle, from relatives, health care providers, insurers. They will be made to feel as though the very fact that they are drawing breath is an inconvenience to someone else.
- Given today's aging population, the significant spike in dementia and Alzheimer's disease, the increasing evidence of elder abuse, and the escalation of health care costs, the risks of coercion and abuse are very real.
- No "safeguards" in any legislation could ever erase the possibility of mistakes, coercion and abuse. There are no safeguards at the time the deadly drugs would be administered, and death certificates would be required to state the cause of death as the terminal illness, not the legal prescription of drugs. Some people's lives will be ended without their consent, and no one will ever know.
- Assisted suicide robs family members of precious once-in-a-lifetime moments, important conversations, and blessed prayerful times at the end-of-life. The act of suicide deeply affects those around the person who has died: shock, anguish, anger, guilt, anxiety, and depression. You can't "un-make" that choice for suicide.
- Pain control has come so far. If we're going to support something, let's support increased education in pain management for all health professionals and education in palliative care. Let's work with lawmakers to remove barriers to hospice care; New York ranks an abysmal 48<sup>th</sup> in the nation in terms of hospice utilization. There is so much more we can do! We should focus on ending the suffering, not ending the life of the sufferer.