

# Keep Doctor-Prescribed Death Out of Vermont

Legislation to allow physician-assisted suicide died in committee in 2006. In March of 2007, a similar bill was defeated by the full House by a vote of 63-82. In 2009 new bills were introduced in both the House and the Senate. Once again, in 2011, we face the specter of new legislation to legalize doctor-assisted suicide.

Catholics must raise their voices against such an affront to human life. Please contact your legislators, both representatives and senators, and tell them to speak out against and vote against assisted suicide legislation in the Vermont legislature.

Visit our Diocesan Website for legislator contact information:

[www.vermontcatholic.org/respectlife](http://www.vermontcatholic.org/respectlife)

# On Holy Ground: A Catholic Instruction on Christian Death



## *On Holy Ground: A Catholic Instruction on Christian Death*

Christ's death was not a meaningless or useless experience. Through His death, Christ brought us redemption, love and life. As we Catholics strive to shape our lives in the image of Christ, we should not allow our deaths to be meaningless or useless experiences. We, too, can use our final days to our advantage. A Christian death can allow us time to give thanks, offer forgiveness and provide an example of how precious and valuable life is.

The Catholic Church believes that a true Christian death has redemptive power. Families often speak of their last days with dying loved ones, recalling them as sad and difficult, but also describe in poignant detail incredible experiences that took place. In those final moments, standing on holy ground, they found comfort and received grace to carry them onward.

The Catholic Church recognizes that dying is a difficult and trying experience, and has long assisted people in dying well. Throughout the nation, health care institutions under Catholic sponsorship offer end-of-life programs. They were among the earliest promoters of Hospice, palliative care and proper pain management.

It is a moral obligation not only for Catholics, but all of humanity, to comfort people in suffering. Catholic teaching strongly affirms that life must be valued not only when it brings pleasure and well-being, but also in times of suffering and death.

However, the pain that often accompanies death need not go unaddressed. Catholic teaching makes clear that suffering without pain relief is

*"True compassion leads to sharing another's pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear."*

- Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, p. 66, 1995

neither necessary nor a moral duty. Catholic teaching has long held that it is acceptable to relieve pain by narcotics, even when the result is decreased consciousness and shortening of life and the indirect hastening of death (Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*, p.118, 1995). The intent in such cases is to treat pain and not to cause death.

It is important that we understand the terms commonly used in this discussion:

Assisted Suicide – when a physician prescribes a lethal dose of medication for consumption by a patient for the purpose of causing that patient's death

Euthanasia – the intentional and direct killing of another human being to end his or her suffering

Palliative Sedation Therapy:(PST):—the use of specific sedative medications, usually in a person who is dying, to relieve intolerable suffering from symptoms that do not respond to treatment. These drugs typically reduce patient consciousness and if not carefully calibrated, may hasten death as a secondary effect. Although patients should not be deprived of consciousness without a compelling reason, PST may be permissible in certain situations provided the intent is to relieve pain, and that proper evaluation and intermittent monitoring is ongoing.

Alarmingly, as PST is frequently practiced, the patient is deprived of nutrients and hydration along with PST. In effect, the cause of death may be dehydration. It is therefore important that patients or family members request nutrition and hydration,



*“An act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator. The error of judgment into which one can fall in good faith does not change the nature of this murderous act, which must always be forbidden and excluded.”*

Catechism of the Catholic Church §2277

even artificially delivered, to the extent that they are absorbed and provide nutrients and water to the patient's body. The advice of a Catholic bioethicist may be very helpful in such circumstances.

People participate in assisted suicide and euthanasia because of fear of pain or because they assume there is no meaning or purpose to dying. Modern methods of pain control assure us that no one need ever suffer unendurable pain.

Beyond that, we Catholics know that the end of our earthly life can bring peace to others in this lifetime and offer us joy in eternity.

Every stage of life is important. The Church recognizes this, and continues to administer the Sacraments that were instituted by Christ to impart grace to our souls throughout all stages of life. The Sacrament of the Sick, through a special anointing at the end of life, is an opportunity for grace to flow to those who are dying and to their families. This entire process, sanctified by Christ, is undercut by assisted suicide and euthanasia. This in effect impedes the flow of grace and can deny the possibility of positive experiences for the dying and their loved ones near the end of life.

**Life is a gift from God. All life, at every stage is precious. We are stewards of life, not dictators of life. When loving others during life and during death, we stand on holy ground and we build the kingdom of Christ.**

## **For more information on Legislation to legalize doctor-assisted suicide:**

[www.vermontcatholic.org/respectlife](http://www.vermontcatholic.org/respectlife)  
[www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/euthanasia/](http://www.usccb.org/prolife/issues/euthanasia/)

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