

New Mexico Conference of Catholic Bishops



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Statement on Assisted Suicide

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The Bishops of New Mexico strongly oppose any possibility of the authorization of assisted suicide by the state. The emerging debate surrounding physician-assisted suicide forces all the members of society to pause. Our laws are meant to protect life. The Catholic Church teaches that we are stewards of life and in heeding God’s command “Thou shall not kill” (Ex 20:13) we recognize that we cannot dispose of life.

Jesus’ sacrifice of himself is the model of the new law “Love one another as I have loved you” (Jn 15:12). Jesus has created a new communion or solidarity among us (1 Cor 12:26-27).

This contemporary discussion in which we are involved also goes to the heart of the purpose of the medical profession. Physicians and other caregivers have the obligation to maintain life and to relieve pain.

Effective treatment of pain should guarantee that no one will suffer a painful death. Healthcare providers must make every effort to ensure that the available medications to eliminate or control pain are provided to a patient.

The Catholic Bishops of New Mexico affirm the teaching of the Catholic Church condemning the immoral and unethical use of physician-assisted suicide. The Catechism of the Catholic Church on assisted suicide is concise and to the point: “Voluntary cooperation in suicide is contrary to the moral law” [no. 2282]. According to the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, an official document promulgated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2001:

The truth that life is a precious gift from God has profound implications for the question of stewardship over human life. We are not the owners of our lives, and hence do not have absolute power over life. We have a duty to preserve our life and to use it for the glory of God; but the duty to preserve life is not absolute, for we may reject life-prolonging procedures that are insufficiently beneficial or excessively burdensome. Suicide and euthanasia are never morally acceptable options.

There is also a very logical argument to be made. Recently the State of New Mexico Legislature debated and passed the abolishment of the death penalty. The State made it clear that it is not acceptable for one Judge and eight jurors to take a person's life based on the fact that human error can occur. The mistake cannot be reversed. In the medical field, with all the wonderful breakthroughs in technology, errors still occur. This error is evident in the number of malpractice lawsuits filed daily in our country. The mistake of one doctor in the case of physician-assisted suicide is not reversible. There are many cases of misdiagnosis. The power to take life should not be placed in the hands of one doctor and a witness.--END