

## Respect for Life Does Not Mean We Prolong Life by Unduly Burdensome Treatments

### Many People are Afraid ...

... of being kept alive past life's natural limits by medical technology. They fear experiencing intolerable pain and suffering, losing control over bodily functions, or lingering with severe dementia. They worry about being abandoned or becoming a burden on others. Today there is a campaign to respond to these fears and needs: "death with dignity" describes a self-inflicted death, generally using a drug overdose prescribed by a doctor for the purpose of suicide.

Catholic teaching views suicide as a grave offense against love of self, one that also breaks the bonds of love and solidarity with family, friends, and God (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* [CCC], no. 2281). But what about those people expected to live less than six months? Such predictions are **notoriously unreliable** and carry a built-in ambiguity: some legal definitions of terminal illness include persons who have a short time to live only if they do not receive life-supporting treatment. People with chronic illnesses or disabilities—who could live a long time if they receive basic care—may be swept up in such a definition.

Most people, regardless of religious affiliation, know that **suicide is a terrible tragedy**, one that a compassionate society should work to prevent. Proponents know these facts, so they avoid terms such as "assisting suicide" and instead use euphemisms such as "aid in dying." The group leading this campaign has even concealed its agenda by changing its name. The **Hemlock Society**, whose very name reminded people of the harsh reality of death by poison, has become "Compassion and Choices." But its agenda promotes neither free choice nor compassion.

*A "better off dead" judgment is fueled by the excessively high premium our culture places on productivity and autonomy, which tends to discount the lives of those who have a disability or are dependent on others.* If these persons say they want to die, others may be tempted to regard this not as a call for help but as the reasonable response to what they agree is a meaningless life. Those who choose to live may then be seen as selfish or irrational, as a needless burden on others, and even be encouraged to view themselves that way.

One cannot uphold human freedom and dignity by devaluing human life. By assuming and sharing our human nature, the Son of God has more fully revealed and enhanced the **sacred character of each human life**. A society that devalues some people's lives, by hastening and

*(continued on page 2)*

### Next Month is *Respect Life* Month

Many pastors will be addressing life issues. In addition, Life Chains will be held across the country. (See feature below) New reading materials have been made available including **brochures** available from USCCB.org:

- Bridges of Mercy for Post-Abortion Healing
- Serene Attentiveness to God's Creation
- Caring for Loved Ones at Life's End
- Every Suicide is Tragic
- Seven Considerations While Navigating Infertility
- Accompanying Expectant Mothers Considering Adoption

Also, our bishops remind us that if you or someone you know is suffering **after abortion**, confidential non-judgmental help is available:

- Call Project Rachel's national toll-free number: 888-456-HOPE(-4673) or
- Visit [HopeAfterAbortion.org](http://HopeAfterAbortion.org).

Finally, in NJ, New Jersey Right to Life fund-raising raffle will be held statewide. NJ parishioners are encouraged to support NJRTL by participating in the raffle.

### What is LIFE CHAIN?

In 2015, **over 1600 cities and towns** held Life Chains. On the first Sunday of each October, Life Chain invites churches to stand on a designated local sidewalk and pray for 90 minutes, while holding one of the following approved pro-life sign messages:

- ABORTION KILLS CHILDREN
- JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS
- ADOPTION: THE LOVING OPTION
- LORD, FORGIVE US AND OUR NATION
- ABORTION HURTS WOMEN
- PRAY TO END ABORTION
- LIFE—THE FIRST INALIENABLE RIGHT

The easy-to-hold 18" x 22" Life Chain signs are back-printed with prayer topics, songs of meditation, the Life Chain Code of Conduct, and a compelling statement on The Purpose of LIFE CHAIN.

During the Life Chain hour, idle chatter, frivolity, and both verbal and physical responses to motorists are strongly discouraged. LIFE CHAIN is a time for prayerful self-analysis, repentance, and serious commitment to helping end abortion in our nation. Check your local parish or county group for a Life Chain near you. [Lifecain.net]

## Many People are Afraid (continued)

facilitating their deaths, will ultimately lose respect for their other rights and freedoms. Dutch doctors, who once limited euthanasia to terminally ill patients, now provide lethal drugs to people with chronic illnesses and disabilities, mental illness, and even melancholy. Once they convinced themselves that ending a short life can be an act of compassion, it was morbidly logical to conclude that ending a longer life may show even more compassion.

A caring community devotes more attention, not less, to members facing the most vulnerable times in their lives. When people are tempted to see their own lives as diminished in value or meaning, they most need the love and assistance of others to assure them of their inherent worth. Even when a cure is not possible, medicine plays a critical role in providing “**palliative care**”—alleviating pain and other symptoms and meeting basic needs. Respect for life does not mean we should deprive suffering patients of needed pain medications out of a misplaced fear that they might have the side effect of shortening life. The risk of such an effect is extremely low when **pain medication** is adjusted to a patient’s level of pain, with the laudable purpose of simply addressing that pain (CCC, no. 2279).

Effective palliative care also allows patients to devote their attention to the unfinished business of their lives, to arrive at a sense of peace with God, with loved ones, and with themselves.

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No one should dismiss this time as useless or meaningless.

Learning how to face this last stage of our earthly lives is one of the most important and meaningful things each of us will do, and care-givers who help people through this process are also doing enormously important work.

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Catholics are increasingly joining disability rights advocates, charitable organizations, and members of the healing professions, to stand for the **dignity of people** with serious illnesses and disabilities and promote life-affirming solutions for their problems and hardships. When we grow old or sick and we are tempted to lose heart, we should be surrounded by people who ask “**How can we help?**” We deserve to grow old in a society that views our cares and needs with a compassion grounded in respect, offering genuine support in our final days.

[Excerpted from: *To Live Each Day with Dignity: A Statement on Physician-Assisted Suicide*. U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, usccb.org]

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## Olympic Star Criticized over Motherhood

In an NBC interview, Kerri Walsh Jennings, the gold-medalist volleyball champion, said:

“My kids gave me the perspective and balance I was missing. It took my game and my desire and my passion for life to the next level. I am hugely **indebted to my children.**”

A number of women attacked both Jennings and NBC for “taking the women’s movement backward.” Why? Because Jennings actually cherishes the gift to bring forth new life. She received negative tweets and comments because she proudly acknowledged that this gift is a natural part of being a female member of the species. [Source: Teresa Tomeo, “Gold-medal Mom,” *Our Sunday Visitor*, 8/28/16]

## Recent Stories Found at LifeNews.com

- Bill Banning Videos Exposing Planned Parenthood is So Bad the *Los Angeles Times* Opposes It - Micaiah Bilger (8/31/16)
- Freia David Has Down Syndrome And Just Retired From Her Job at McDonalds After 32 Years - D. Bettinelli (8/31/16)
- Adult Stem Cells: The Best Kept Secret In Medicine - David Prentice, Ph.D. (8/30/16)
- Confirmed: Planned Parenthood Killed Young, Black Woman in Botched Legal Abortion - Cheryl Sullenger (8/31/16)
- Pro-Life Mural Goes Viral in Ireland: “Abortion Stops a Beating Heart” - Cora Sherlock (8/1/16)

## Prayer and the Dignity of Human Life

Sister Mary Catherine Perry, O.P. (Rosary Shrine, Summit, NJ) declared: “I think the reason why people struggle and maybe are cynical about prayer is that, as a society, we have lost the sense of being children of God. We have lost the sense that we are God's creatures, that we were **made in his image & likeness**, & we owe him our life, we wouldn't exist without him, and we are dependent on him as a child to a father.” [Source: *Nat. Review Inst.*, 8/12/16]

## Would You Adopt a Neighbor’s Children?

After her close friend Beth Laitkep died from cancer, Stephanie Culley and her husband made a sacrificial decision that few others would – they **adopted Beth’s six children**, bringing their Virginia family total to nine children.

The decision to adopt Beth’s children has brought much joy. Stephanie explained that her outlook changed with the adoption. “My husband and I laugh because we didn’t really plan on having any kids and here we are with nine. When I first realized that I was going to do this I was scared to death, but as we walked this journey, it’s so much better than anything I had in my head.” [LifeNews.com, 7/25/16]