

Understanding End of Life Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Contemplating end of life issues is never easy. When God created man, His intent was for him to live forever. This life was to be one of complete harmony between man and his creator, with man having stewardship over God's creation, while at the same time remaining joyfully dependent on His life-giving and life-sustaining provision. Thus, our natural inclination is to want to live and not to die. Tragically, Adam declared to be an autonomous creature, a law to himself, apart and independent from God, and in so doing corrupted our very nature to be one in constant rebellion against Him. Because of this, we have been consigned to return to the dust of the earth, from whence we came.

The good news is that Jesus took our sin to the Cross, dying in our stead, and rose to make us right with the Father, defeat death and give us certain hope of everlasting life in His presence. Sadly, as a result of life in a fallen world, we die, and very rightly mourn when death occurs, as this is not how God had originally intended for us to be! We are very sad to be without loved ones, and when it is our turn, we may be frightened. When we as Christian believers die though, we do so knowing that our souls are with God, awaiting the resurrection on the Last Day, when they will be reunited with our risen and glorified bodies.

WHO'S IN CONTROL?

Although we are baptized believers, the old Adam in us continues to fuel a desire for independence and autonomy. Knowing this, we can see the spiritual growth that takes place during times of chronic illnesses when we are unable to get around, lose our so-called "independence" and fully realize how dependent we are, and always have been, on God through others in our midst. Those of us who become caregivers grow as well, as we learn to exercise that sacrificial love which we are free to do, having been redeemed by the One who first sacrificially loved us.

Accepting our limitations and bearing our burdens with trust in God as we suffer chronic illness and approach death serves as a powerful witness to others of Christ, who Himself became weak and suffered to redeem us from the wrath of God, sin, death and hell. It is thus unsurprising that this is where Satan mounts some of his fiercest attacks, as he convinces the sufferer, and the unbelieving world around him, that with the loss of "independence," s/he is simply a burden and his/her life is no longer worth living, and that his/her family and society as a whole are in fact, better off with his/her death. Of course, secular language is superficially "kind," pointing to a relief from suffering. Yet the intended *telos* (end) of Satan's work is the death of the believer and the destruction of the witness of Christ and Him-crucified for the forgiveness of sins. But God is still in control and as Christians our faith stands firm in Him who is faithful even unto death. Still there are questions that arise as we approach end of life.

EUTHANASIA AND PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE

At her recent 67th Regular Convention, our Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod adopted a Resolution opposing physician assisted suicide, encouraging education on the sanctity of life and the dangers of physician assisted suicide, and encouraging members of LCMS congregations to have a voice in the public square opposing physician assisted suicide (Resolution 11-06A, *Today's Business*, Issue 2B, pp 288-289).

For the sake of discussion, euthanasia and physician assisted suicide refer to deliberate action taken to end a life with the intention of relieving suffering. It is unfortunate that the laws in an increasing number of jurisdictions allow for assisted suicide. Even in places where it is illegal, there are often pressures exerted to push individuals toward premature death. Some of these are easy to identify, such as when an insurance company denies payment for a treatment that might provide meaningful help. Some are subtler, such as when a hospital team withholds fluids and nutrition for the purpose of speeding death. ***To be clear, everyone reaches a point at which therapies aiming to cure will no longer work and are no longer appropriate.*** In those cases, the sufferer patiently awaits God's call, secure in His promise of eternal life. It is never appropriate to withhold basic care unless there is a very specific contraindication, such as life-threatening aspiration. Occasionally, treatments, such as pain medications, may in fact result in an earlier death, but the intent there is always to care and never to kill.

HELP WITH DECISION MAKING

Given the sad state of affairs in which we find ourselves, it is important to plan ahead. Many are tempted to simply complete living wills, without the realization that these documents were originally conceived by euthanasia advocates and are often used to prematurely end peoples' lives without their consent. A much better option is a **Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care**, which is one or more individuals selected by us, who share our sanctity of life beliefs, and with whom we have discussed our wishes concerning treatment, should we become unable to make those decisions. These individuals are then looking out for us, and our witness, as they work with health care professionals and facilities on our behalf. Once these individuals are selected, it is important to express our wishes in writing. Our national Lutherans for Life group has created helpful information with links to several forms developed for this purpose, at <https://www.lutheransforlife.org/article/the-basics-on-advance-directives-thy-will-be-done/>.

Our CLC Lutherans for Life Team has collected the following information onto this webpage to provide resources for you as you consider your own end of life planning, assist others and advocate in the community. You will find links to material on what the Church teaches on the sanctity of life, material on assisted suicide legislation from a group which supports euthanasia (as distasteful as it is to access such websites, they are often the best source of information to track the status of the attacks on life), and material on hospice and palliative care. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to speak with Pastor or a member of the Life Team. Remember that Jesus walked this path as well and that in your wounds you are upheld in His. You are never alone. May our Lord grant us each a blessed and peaceful death, fully trusting that we will awaken to the bright joy of His eternal presence (*Pastoral Care Companion* p 226). Amen.

Lutheran Church Missouri Synod – Life Ministry

- LCMS Life Library, accessible on the [LCMS Life Ministry](#) home page. This has a library of short articles on the range of life issues grouped by topic; the specific topics of interest to end of life include Bioethics, Christian Ethics, Death, Euthanasia, Sanctity of Life, Suffering and Vocation.
- John T. Pless, *Mercy at Life's End, A Guide for Laity and Their Pastors* (St. Louis: LCMS, 2013), available at <https://www.lcms.org/how-we-serve/mercy/life-ministry> on this home page for the LCMS Life Ministry, scroll down to Resources, and under that to Documents and Writings, and is the third down on the list
- [Commission on Theology and Church Relations report Christian Care at Life's End \(1993\)](#), Click on the link entitled Christian Care at Life's End to download the PDF version for free. (the document is sixth from the top)

Lutherans For Life

The Mission of Lutherans for Life is to equip Lutherans to be gospel-motivated voices for life.

- [End of Life Resources](#)
This link to the Lutherans for Life website contains useful links to articles and resources on end of life issues.

Christian Life Resources (WELS)

Christian Life Resources subjects itself to the doctrine and practice of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. They are not, however, directly supervised or funded by the WELS budget or its administrators. The mission of Christian Life Resources is to use Life and Family issues as bridges to convey the Love of God to share the message of salvation through Jesus Christ.

- [Durable Power of Attorney Document – Christian version](#)
Endorsed also by Lutherans for Life
- [Questions and Answers on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide](#)
Primer on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide
- [Ethical and Social Issues - Suicide](#)
Information on Assisted Suicide as well as helpful articles to assist those who may be contemplating suicide.

Bioedge – A weekly bioethics newsletter bringing news from around the world regarding bioethics and health issues.

The Charlotte Lozier Institute

“The goal of the Charlotte Lozier Institute is to promote deeper public understanding of the value of human life, motherhood, and fatherhood, and to identify policies and practices that will protect life and serve both women’s health and family well-being. Our profound conviction is that the insights available through the best science, sociology and psychology cannot help but demonstrate that each and every human is not only “fearfully and wonderfully made” but blessed to be born at this time in human history.” The Lozier Institute address issues across the spectrum of the sanctity of life and the website has very helpful material on end of life concerns.

National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

This organization supports health care professionals and the general public when making end of life decisions. Although its messaging does not support euthanasia or physician assisted suicide, its membership base is so broad that it tends to have “gray areas” when interpreting end of life care and may not advocate for what is appropriate end of life care for Christian.

- **CaringInfo**

CaringInfo is a program of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization providing free resources to help people make decisions about end-of-life care and services before a crisis. Information about hospice, palliative care and caregiving are located on this page.

Assisted Suicide Funding Restriction Act

Restricts federal funding for physician assisted suicide. Became law in 1997.

American College of Physicians (ACP) Position Paper

The ACP affirms a professional responsibility to improve the care of dying patients and their families. The ACP does not support the legalization of physician-assisted suicide, the practice of which raises ethical, clinical, and other concerns. The ACP and its members, including those who might lawfully participate in the practice, should ensure that all patients can rely on high-quality care through to the end of life, with prevention or relief of suffering insofar as possible, a commitment to human dignity and management of pain and other symptoms, and support for families. Physicians and patients must continue to search together for answers to the challenges posed by living with serious illness before death.

Arizona Death with Dignity

Provides current status of AZ legislations related to physician assisted suicide. Both the Arizona House and Senate have introduced bills to legalize physician assisted suicide in 2021. We do not in any way endorse this group but include the listing as this may be the only source of information identifying politicians who favor assisted suicide and euthanasia.