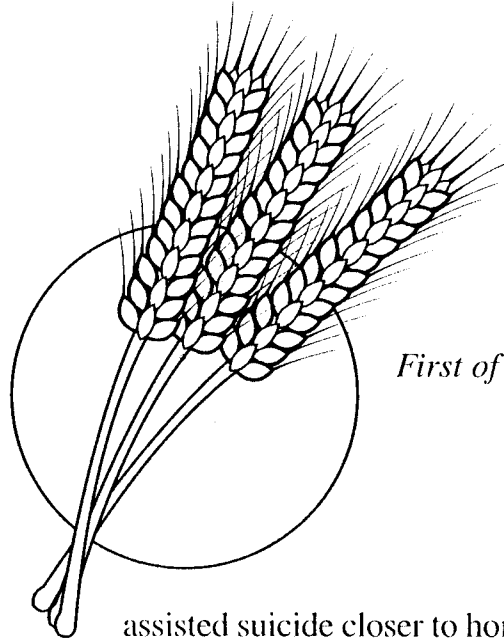


“WHAT’S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?”

WHY ASSISTED SUICIDE AND DYING ARE ON THE CHURCH’S AGENDA.



First of an 8 Part Series

Baptisms. Weddings. Sunday Mass. Jack Kevorkian. Assisted Suicide.

What’s going on these days in the Catholic Church, with all this talk about death and dying? Isn’t assisted suicide illegal in Massachusetts? Why is the Church so concerned? What’s all the fuss about anyway?

In 1998, the Catholic Bishops of all four Massachusetts dioceses announced the creation of a new initiative called *In Support of Life*. They saw the threat of assisted suicide as the issue of the future, a challenge to our faith with far-reaching implications.

In the fall of 2000, two events will happen in New England that may rival the “shot heard ‘round the world” in 1776. A new revolution is in the works, but its aim is not freedom from tyranny, but freedom from life.

In September 2000, the World Federation of Right to Die Societies will meet in Boston. Assisted suicide advocates from around the globe will gather to discuss their cause.

The first item on the conference agenda will be the assisted suicide referendum in Maine, scheduled for November 2000. If it passes, the Maine ballot proposal will bring doctor-

assisted suicide closer to home. Like it or not, the issue is coming down the pike, or in this case, I-95.

Assisted suicide is against the law in Massachusetts. But for how long? If Maine joins Oregon, which legalized assisted suicide in 1994, then the pressure will increase to change the law here as well. We can no longer take for granted that the lives of the dying will be respected in our state.

The assisted suicide debate is in many ways a spiritual one. Medicine can only go so far in treating the exterior body. The question is, who will attend to the soul? Jack Kevorkian? Unfortunately, all too many people feel they have nowhere else to turn. We face a great challenge.

That’s why the Catholic Church in Massachusetts must act now. We have a window of opportunity to reach minds and hearts in the Commonwealth, to strengthen our capacity to care for the dying, and to influence public policy through the promotion of positive solutions.

Mindful of the events in Boston and Maine, and fully aware of the true needs of the dying, the Church proclaims the following truths:

Human life is always a good. From the first moment of our existence we are eternal beings, possessing a God-given and changeless dignity. Thus, the Catholic vision of the dying person rejects any “quality of life” calculus of human worth based on the decline of our earthly functions.

We respect human life by caring, not killing. Our faith calls us not only to oppose murder, but also to reach out to persons nearing death with positive responses to their real needs for companionship, comfort, and hope. Refraining from harm is not enough. We are called to give of ourselves for the good of others.

The underlying evil at issue in the assisted suicide debate is the belief that human life is no longer a good. The Church opposes the view that human life can become a meaningless and useless burden fit only for death. Willing one’s death denies life’s intrinsic dignity.

Persons who commit suicide may still enjoy eternal salvation through God’s providence. Objectively, suicide is always an evil; subjectively, a suicidal person may be induced to reject life as a result of depression and emotional distress. The Church refuses to condemn persons driven to suicide by mental disturbance and prays for them always.

We are not required to sustain life by avoiding death at all costs, since life is not an absolute good. The Church recognizes that the value of accepting natural death in trustful surrender to God will at some point outweigh the merits of aggressively avoiding death. We are not required to live at all costs, as if life were an absolute good. Life has its limits in the natural process of dying. Accepting this reality is not the same as rejecting the good of life by willing death.

*Contact the Massachusetts Catholic Conference or visit our website at www.macathconf.org for more information about *In Support of Life*.*

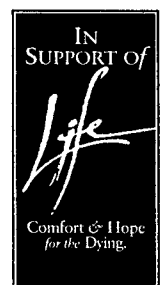
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A Catholic Initiative Responding to the Needs of the Dying & the Threat of Assisted Suicide