

# “KEEP YOUR BELIEFS AWAY FROM MY DYING!”

ASSISTED SUICIDE, THE LAW,  
AND CHRISTIAN WITNESS.



*Last of an  
8 Part Series*

During the 1994 campaign to legalize assisted suicide in Oregon, radio ads by the Hemlock Society called on voters to “stop the Catholic Church from ramming its views down our throats”.

Such blistering rhetoric aims to put Catholics and other religious groups on the defensive. The message is clear: keep your faith convictions to yourself; they don't belong in the public arena.

This hostility against religion has discouraged Catholics and other people of good will from acting on their beliefs in the public arena. Because our convictions against assisted suicide, abortion, and the death penalty, for example, are counter-cultural, we as individuals might hesitate to proclaim them, fearing either the sting of reproach or the embarrassment of being ignored.

What are we to do?

## *Finding our voice*

The 1998 statement of all the Catholic Bishops in the United States, “Living the Gospel of Life”, points the way. It urges Catholics to be witnesses to certain fundamental truths about the dignity of

all human life. It describes these truths in the language of our country's founding ideals, making our convictions accessible to all persons of good will, whether or not they share our faith or any faith at all.

As the Bishops noted, “The inherent value of human life, at every stage and in every circumstance, is not a sectarian issue any more than the Declaration of Independence is a sectarian creed.”

Ours is not a mission of coercion, nor is our message a threatening one of “believe it or else”. That's a false picture promoted by those that do not want our true message to be heard.

Instead, we speak to the hearts and minds of others, and by our example we encourage generosity, openness to realities beyond the worldly, and a profound appreciation of the dignity of the human person.

## *The witness of active citizenship*

What does it mean to be a “witness”? How is it done? In the context of influencing public policy on issues concerning human dignity, the best witness is an active citizenship.

As citizens, Catholics are blessed in this country with the promise of our Constitution, which guarantees every citizen the right to fully participate in our democracy on behalf of truth and freedom.

Being an active citizen means keeping up on public policy developments, learning more about the issues from the perspective of Catholic social doctrine, and making your voice heard.

Letters to the editor, radio talk shows, and internet chat rooms offer only some of the avenues available to the average citizen. Calling on public officials, and voting responsibly, are rights that every citizen possesses.

In “Living the Gospel of Life”, the Bishops remind us that “Every voice matters in the public forum. Every vote counts. Every act of responsible citizenship is an exercise of significant individual power.”

#### *Assisted suicide and the law as teacher*

Presently, the law in Massachusetts bans the act of assisting in suicide as a crime. The law teaches thereby that every person is valuable and worthy of protection.

***This bulletin insert is provided by the Massachusetts Catholic Conference as part of its initiative In Support of Life. To learn more you can contact our office at 1-617-367-6060 or visit our website at [www.macathconf.org](http://www.macathconf.org).***

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Those who propose to change the law by legalizing assisted suicide for the terminally ill want to change the lesson plan. The law would then be sending an entirely different message: some lives are not worth living.

The devaluation of life at its beginnings, as accomplished by the legalization of abortion, would then be mirrored by the devaluation of life as natural death approaches.

The question then becomes “Whose beliefs will apply to the dying?” Do we want the law to say that all human lives are inherently valuable, or that some lives are unequal in dignity?

As citizens, Catholics have just as much stake in the answer to this question as anyone else does. Do we have the courage to make our voices heard?

