
Can someone considering Euthanasia or P.A.S. receive the sacraments?

Near the end of life Catholics will normally celebrate the sacraments of Confession, Communion and Anointing of the Sick. These sacraments are given to bring forgiveness of sins and to strengthen the recipient to bear patiently his or her sufferings, uniting them to the Cross of Jesus Christ.

The Church is generous in offering the sacraments; however, it is crucial that an individual have the proper disposition of faith to receive a sacrament (*Canon 843*). If someone has made the decision to end his or her life – contrary to divine law and Church teaching – and is unwilling to reconsider this decision, he or she is not rightly disposed in faith to receive the sacraments. In this case a priest will continue to pray with the person, offering pastoral support while encouraging a change of heart.

Sacraments bear fruit only in those who receive them with the right disposition. (*Catechism 1131*) An attitude of faith and openness is essential.

Can a Catholic Funeral be celebrated for someone who has ended his or her life by Euthanasia or P.A.S.?

The purpose of the funeral rites of the Church is to pray for the eternal salvation of the deceased person. We ask God to be merciful, forgive their sins and receive them into eternal life.

“We should not despair of the eternal salvation of persons who have taken their own lives. By ways known to him alone, God can provide the opportunity for salutary repentance. The Church prays for persons who have taken their own lives.”
(*Catechism 2283*)

The Church frequently celebrates funeral rites for someone who has committed suicide; however, in the case of Euthanasia and P.A.S., care must be taken that the funeral preparation and rites (including the obituary) are not presented in such a way as to show support for the person’s decision to end their life.

In such cases, there may be concern that the wrong message will be communicated by celebrating a funeral Mass. The priest, in this situation, may suggest more discrete alternatives for the funeral rites. In such circumstances the Bishop will be consulted.

For more information visit:
www.hamiltondiocese.com/Palliative.Care

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Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide



A Statement to the Faithful in the Catholic Diocese of Hamilton

On June 17, 2016, Euthanasia and Physician-Assisted Suicide (hereafter P.A.S.) were legalized in Canada. An individual may now request that a doctor terminate their life or assist them in doing so. This is sometimes referred to as *Medical Assistance in Dying*. As Catholics we are called to something very different. Pope Francis has said, “True compassion does not marginalise, humiliate or exclude, much less celebrate a patient passing away ... compassion does not mean pity, it means ‘suffering with.’”

The availability of Euthanasia and P.A.S. changes how Canadians will make decisions about end of life care.

The purpose of this pamphlet is to explain the Catholic Church's position on Euthanasia and P.A.S. and the pastoral care that the Church offers to the sick and dying.

What is the Church's position on Euthanasia and P.A.S.?

The Catholic Faith has consistently taught that it is always gravely wrong to commit suicide, or to help another person do so. While we offer understanding and sympathy when suicide occurs, we can never condone making an informed decision to take one's life or to assist another in doing so.

"We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of."
(*Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2281*)

Life is a gift from God to be cared for and protected at all its stages. As Catholics we believe that we are called to live our lives to the fullest extent possible from birth until natural death.

How should we respond to those who request Euthanasia and P.A.S.?

Suicide is always a tragedy. If we meet someone who is suicidal we try to intervene and prevent them from harming themselves. The desire for death often stems from depression, fear or another crisis. Rather than assist a person to end their life we should try to address the underlying problems that make them believe their life is not worth living.

Euthanasia and P.A.S., while involving greater deliberation, call for a similar response. We must try to discover why the person believes their life is no longer worth living. Are they suffering pain or loneliness? Are they afraid of living with limited capabilities or becoming a burden to others? Whatever the problem, we should try to intervene with support that will help the person to deal with their anxieties, enabling them to find options other than death as a solution.

But isn't this a private decision? If I choose to end my life, how does that affect you?

Suicide is never a private action. It affects a person's loved ones who will mourn their passing and are now deprived of a sibling, child, friend or parent. Euthanasia and P.A.S. also affect doctors and other health care professionals, as it is contrary to their vocation to heal and often against their own conscience. Euthanasia and P.A.S. also have social effects. Experience in the Netherlands and Belgium shows that these practices become ever more common, often making the aged and infirm feel obligated to end their lives.

What about the dignity of the person? Is it dignified to be incapacitated or to live with unbearable suffering?

As Christians we believe our dignity comes not from what we can do but who we are as God's children. A death with dignity is a death where I am treated as a child of God. Taking a life never corresponds to the dignity of the person. A society that respects the dignity of all persons is one that cares for those who are sick, suffering or disabled. No one should ever feel that death is their only option.

Friends, family and parishioners are called to share time with those who are ill, disabled or dying to help them avoid loneliness and despair. While we all face suffering in life, we need not suffer alone.

Dying with dignity means people would be accompanied in their last days, be provided with effective pain treatment and medical care and be offered access to spiritual and pastoral support.

Refusing treatment that is burdensome or without benefit to the person is not a form of suicide but of allowing life to proceed to its natural end. Effective pain management and palliative care are available in most cases. The Church teaches that it is morally permissible to administer pain medication, even if it hastens the death of the patient, as long as the intention is to ease suffering rather than cause death.

The Catholic Church in Canada is lobbying to make effective palliative care more universally available, to ensure that people spend their final days as peacefully and comfortably as possible.

Can a Catholic who is considering Euthanasia and P.A.S. speak with his or her priest?

Catholics are encouraged to speak with their pastors about any issue troubling them, especially before making end of life decisions. Pastors visit the sick and dying regularly. They will pray with the person and listen to their doubts and fears. If someone expresses interest in Euthanasia or P.A.S., a priest will listen carefully, pray with them, and encourage the person to seek options more in keeping with their dignity as a child of God.
