

The Washington State Catholic Conference (WSCC) represents the Catholic Bishops of Washington State: Archbishop Alex J. Brunett of the Archdiocese of Seattle; Bishop William S. Skylstad of the Diocese of Spokane; Bishop Carlos A. Sevilla, S.J., of the Diocese of Yakima; Bishop Eusebio Elizondo, M.Sp.S. and Bishop Joseph J. Tyson, Auxiliary Bishops of the Archdiocese of Seattle.



“Respecting Life at the End of Life”
Washington State Catholic Bishops Oppose I-1000
That Legalizes Physician-assisted Suicide

A well-financed initiative campaign is currently seeking to legalize physician-assisted suicide in Washington State. Proponents of the measure (Initiative 1000) maintain that individuals in the final stages of a terminal illness should have the choice to end their lives on their own terms. This assertion is contrary to our Catholic teaching. We believe that God alone has sovereignty over life, and that human beings are not simply autonomous individuals, but a family called into communion with God and each other.

Based on Sacred Scripture and tradition, the Catholic Church teaches that all life is a gift from the Creator. As God’s creation, the value and dignity of human life cannot be limited by the boundaries of our earthly existence. We therefore embrace the hope that the fullness of life consists not in the number of our days, but in sharing the very life of God. This sacred reality calls us to be grateful stewards of life from its beginning to its natural end.

Initiative 1000 contradicts this understanding and represents a dangerous new assault on the culture of life. Of special concern is the threat that legalizing assisted suicide poses for vulnerable persons, who are already at risk of marginalization by an individualistic and utilitarian perspective of life. Those most at risk from this dangerous change in public policy are elderly persons, those without adequate health care, people with disabilities and those with no family support system.

Further, by turning suicide into a medical option that can be exercised without consulting family or friends, it radically alters the relationship between physicians and their terminally-ill patients, depriving patients of the vital support their family, friends and faith can provide in making good decisions at the end of life. It may also put the decision for life and death into the hands of insurance companies, which may be motivated only by financial gain and not the best interest of the patient.

Through the compassionate care of hospice services, we have learned that people faced with their own mortality have a deep desire to embrace what they value most. They want a final opportunity to grant and seek forgiveness, to offer thanks, to demonstrate love and to say good-bye. Assisted suicide denies dying persons the one possession necessary to fulfill these desires: time.

All Catholics have a duty to bring their faith and values into the public square in order to build a just society. Because God alone has sovereignty over the sacred gift of life, we uphold the dignity of all human life regardless of frailty or social definitions of usefulness. As the bishops of Washington State, we oppose Initiative 1000 and ask all Catholics before voting on this measure to inform their consciences about the Church's teaching on end of life decisions.

As stewards of life, individuals and society have a responsibility to promote compassion and care for people suffering from terminal illnesses, always striving to give them hope and to alleviate their fear, pain and loneliness. Our participation as faithful citizens responsible for establishing and maintaining laws that respect life must always seek the common good and protect vulnerable people, including those confronting death, by ensuring that their final days are lived as fully as possible in the company of family and friends.

Initiative 1000 stands in stark opposition to our teaching, and we urge all Catholic people to commit themselves to study and prayer in order to better understand Catholic teaching on end-of-life issues, and to explain the dangers of Initiative 1000 to family members, friends and neighbors.

For more information to assist you in better understanding this important issue, visit the Washington State Catholic Conference website at www.thewsc.org or call (206) 301-0556.