

What Catholics Believe About Life and Death

This summary of Catholic moral principles was included in two documents published by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee for Pro-Life Activities: *Guidelines for Legislation on Life-Sustaining Treatment* (1984) and *Nutrition and Hydration--Moral and Pastoral Reflections* (1992, 1998).

- Human life is the foundation for all other human goods and has a special value and significance.
- Every human being has a unique dignity and value from the moment of conception and in every stage of development, whatever his or her physical condition.
- Death is unavoidable and opens the door to eternal life. A person of faith should be prepared to accept death when the time comes without in any way trying to hasten the hour of death.
- Suffering is a fact of human life, and when necessary or unavoidable can be an opportunity to share in Christ's redemptive suffering.
- However, there is nothing wrong in trying to relieve a person's suffering as long as one does not intentionally cause death or interfere with the person's other moral or religious duties.
- Every person has the duty to care for his or her own life and health and to seek necessary medical care. However, this does not mean that all possible remedies must be used in every circumstance.
- A person is not obliged to use treatments which offer no reasonable benefit or involve excessive burdens to the patient, the family or the community.
- A person is not obliged to prolong life by every means possible. For example, when death is imminent it is permitted to refuse forms of treatment which would only prolong life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted.
- Euthanasia, willful suicide, or any other action or omission which of itself or by intention causes death, is never permissible.