

JOINT DECLARATION on END OF LIFE AND PALLIATIVE CARE by the Methodist Church and the Pontifical Academy for Life

INTRODUCTION

While we applaud medical science for advances to prevent and cure disease, we recognize that every mortal life will ultimately end in death. For a Christian, death is not a hopeless adventure; it is the door of life that opens to eternity; it is the experience of participation in the mystery of Christ's death and resurrection.

SUFFERING AND DYING

Because Christian faith is relevant to every aspect of life, no one should be expected to cope with life's pain, suffering, and ultimate death without the help of God through other people. Care for dying persons is part of our stewardship of the divine gift of life when a cure is no longer possible. Holistic and respectful care of the person must promote the - *uniquely human and Christian dimension of dying* as the fundamental objective. This approach to death requires compassion and professionalism on the part of psychologically and emotionally competent health care workers.

THE USE OF MEDICAL TECHNOLOGY AT THE END OF LIFE

As human interventions, medical technologies are only justified by the help that they can provide. Their use requires responsible judgment about when life-sustaining treatments truly support the goals of human life, and when they have reached their limits. When inevitable death is imminent despite the means used, it is permitted in conscience to make the decision to refuse forms of treatment that would only secure a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life, so long as the normal care due to the sick person in similar cases is not interrupted. Even when staving off death seems futile or unreasonably burdensome to continue, we must continue to offer comfort care: effective pain relief, companionship, and support for the patient in the hard and sacred work of preparing for death.

THE REJECTION OF EUTHANASIA

For the health care worker, to serve human life means to respect it and care for it without hastening its end. The human person is not the master of life, but its faithful steward; indeed, human life is a gift from God, and therefore it is inviolable and not arbitrarily disposable. Neither can the health care worker consider himself or herself an arbiter over either life or death. The Catholic tradition and the United Methodist tradition oppose euthanasia – that is the taking of life - as an offense against God's sole dominion over life, an abandonment of hope and humility before God, and an affront to the dignity of and the solidarity among human beings. For medical science it marks a backward step of surrender, as well as an insult to the personal dignity of the one who is dying.

THE NURTURING COMMUNITY

Death is an event that introduces one into God's life, a revelation that manifests the word of truth. It is therefore necessary to give an *evangelical meaning to death*: proclaiming how the Gospel can enlighten and support the dying person. We recognize the agonizing personal and moral decisions faced by the dying, their physicians, their families, their friends, and their faith community. We emphasize that decisions faced by the dying be made with thoughtful and prayerful consideration by the parties involved, with medical, pastoral, and other appropriate counsel. This is a pastoral duty of the ecclesial community to all its members, according to each one's responsibilities.

SPIRITUAL AND PASTORAL CARE

The highest form of humanizing the dying process that health care and pastoral workers can offer is providing a faith-and-hope-filled presence. The pastoral care of the sick consists in spiritual and religious assistance. This is a fundamental right of the patient and a duty of the Church. Because of the necessary interaction between the physical, psychological and spiritual dimension of the person, and the duty of honoring their own faith, all health care workers are bound to create the conditions by which religious assistance is assured to anyone who asks for it, either expressly or implicitly.

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR PROVIDING CARE

The duty to care for the sick calls us to reform the structures and institutions by which health and spiritual care are delivered when they fail to provide the comprehensive physical, social, emotional, and spiritual care needed by those facing grave illness and death. Absence of comfort care can leave people with a distorted choice between enduring unrelieved suffering and isolation, and choosing death. This choice undermines rather than enhances our humanity. We as a society must assure that patients' desire not to be a financial burden does not tempt them to choose death rather than receiving the care and support that could enable them to live out their remaining time in comfort and peace.

THE PROMOTION OF PALLIATIVE CARE

We encourage palliative care to support and provide companionship during illness and at the end of life. The basic philosophy of palliative care is to achieve the best quality of life for patients suffering incurable, progressive illness even when their illness cannot be cured. Palliative care is a health care specialty that is both a philosophy of care and an organized, highly structured system for delivering care. Palliative care services are critical for realizing the most ancient mission of medicine "to care even when it cannot cure". Palliative care is an expression of the truly human devotion to taking care of one another, especially of those who suffer. We should encourage professionals and students to specialize in this type of assistance which is no less valuable though it may not be considered "life-saving". Palliative care accomplishes something equally important: it values the person.


CONCLUSION: PROCLAIMING THE GOOD NEWS

God has continued love and purpose for all persons, regardless of health.

Pope Francis encourages: "I especially ask Christians in communities throughout the world to offer a radiant and attractive witness of fraternal communion. Let everyone admire how you care for one another, and how you encourage and accompany one another: "By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

As the Catholic Church and the United Methodist Church:

- We reject euthanasia and any pressure upon the dying to end their lives.
- We encourage and support the concept of palliative care in all places and for everyone.
- We affirm laws and policies that protect the rights and dignity of the dying.
- We commit to advocate, identify, and address instances where proper care for the suffering and dying is unavailable due to scarcity of resources, unhealthy ideologies, and oppressive conditions.
- We commit to train pastors and pastoral caregivers in the issues of bioethics as well as in the techniques of compassionate companionship for those who are suffering and dying.
- We commit to educate and equip Christians through preaching resources and adult education programs to consider treatments for the suffering and the dying in the context of Christian affirmations of God's providence and hope.


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