

Those who are sick or frail, and older people, deserve our particular respect. They are our brothers and sisters in Christ. Earlier this year in his Lenten Message, Pope John Paul II asked us to 'deepen the awareness of the role that older people are called to play in society and in the Church' and in so doing to 'prepare our hearts for the loving welcome that should always be reserved for them'.

The Pope's message was particularly forceful, as it was written by an elderly man showing the world every day that all life is worth living. John Paul II reminded us with his own painful witness, that we can never say that a person, weakened by sickness or age, is useless and is no more than a burden to society. We are challenged to love the life of older people with a reminder that in scripture, reaching old age is a sign of God's benevolence and longevity is prized as a special divine gift.

Thanks to the contribution of science and medicine, one sees in society today a lengthening of the human life span and a subsequent increase in the number of elderly. This demands a more specific attention to the world of so-called 'old' age, in order to help its members to live their full potential by placing them at the service of the entire community. It is necessary to raise the awareness in public opinion that older people represent a resource to be valued.

Pope John Paul II

When a decision is taken to terminate the life of a person who is sick or elderly, on the grounds that his or her life is no longer worth living, this is euthanasia.

Whether it is by doing something, or by doing nothing when something should be done; be it with or without the consent of the person who is killed, euthanasia comes down to the same thing in moral terms. It is the deliberate killing of a human being, and it is contrary to the law of God. God is the giver of life, and he alone has the right to decide when a life should end.



Human life is a precious gift to be loved and defended in each of its stages. The Commandment, 'You shall not kill!', always requires respecting and promoting human life, from its beginning to its natural end. It is a command that applies even in the presence of illness and when physical weakness reduces the person's ability to be self-reliant.

Pope John Paul II

Must we, in the case of terminal illness, do everything and anything possible to stay alive, despite the condition we may be in? The answer to this is clearly 'No'. There is no civil or religious law which says that we must stay alive at any cost. What is never permitted, however, is any act or omission which is intended to cause death in order to free a person from suffering.

According to the doctrine of 'double effect', it is permissible to alleviate pain by administering drugs like morphine which it is foreseen may shorten life (the intention being to ease distress). To give an overdose or injection with the direct intention of terminating a patient's life however is morally indefensible.

The right to be able to choose to die can too easily become a duty to die. The philosophical advocates of euthanasia have often made this clear.

Once society allows voluntary euthanasia we will have set foot on a slippery slope that will lead us inevitably to non-voluntary euthanasia.

People who are dying want to know that, even though there is no prospect of recovery, they will not be abandoned. It is important that the kind of care a sick person receives is not dictated by the fears or the convenience of others.

We cherish the 'Evening of Life' as we pray:

May He support us all the day long, till the shades lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over and our work is done! Then in His Mercy may He give us a safe lodging and a holy rest and peace at the last.

Cardinal Newman

*A 'Day for Life' 2005
is celebrated in Scotland on 31 May,
in England and Wales on 3 July
and in Ireland on 2 October.*



RESOURCES

www.catholiccommunications.ie/dayforlife

Resources for Day for Life from the Catholic Communications Office including Liturgy and Reading Resources.

www.dayforlife.org

Portal website for the 'Day for Life' 2005 celebrations in The Bishops' Conferences of England & Wales, Ireland and Scotland.

www.catholichealthcare.ie

Catholic Healthcare Commission

www.healthcare-ethics.ie

Website of the Irish Bishops' Committee for Bioethics

www.linacre.org

A research institute specialising in bioethics

www.thesocialagenda.org

Material on euthanasia published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace

www.vatican.va

Official website of the Holy See

PUBLICATIONS

Living with Dying

Irish Bishops' Conference Pastoral to mark the Day for Life 2002
www.healthcare-ethics.ie

End of Life Care: Ethical and Pastoral Issues
Irish Bishops' Committee for Bioethics
www.healthcare-ethics.ie

Cherishing Life

Bishops' Conference of England and Wales
www.catholic-ew.org.uk/cherishinglife

Euthanasia, Clinical Practice and the Law
The Linacre Centre, London
admin@linacre.org

PRAYER FOR LIFE

O Mary, bright dawn of the new world,
Mother of the living,
to you do we entrust the cause of life.
Grant that all who believe in your Son
may proclaim the Gospel of life
with honesty and love to the people of our
time.
Obtain for them the grace to accept that
Gospel
as a gift ever new,
the joy of celebrating it with gratitude
throughout their lives and the courage to
bear witness to it resolutely, in order to
build,
together with all people of good will,
the civilisation of truth and love,
to the praise and glory of God,
the Creator and lover of life.

Evangelium vitae No: 105

Cherishing the Evening of Life

Pastoral Letter from the
Irish Catholic Bishops' Conference

Day for Life
2 October 2005