

**Press Conference: September 24, 2002
Advance Care Directives**

**Comments by
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Catholic teaching celebrates life as a gift of a loving God and respects each human life because we are made in the image and likeness of God. And we teach that each person has a right to make health care decisions that respect the gift of life. We also teach that responsibility may be assumed for someone incapable of making his or her own decisions. The completion of Advance Care Directives is consistent with our moral tradition and helps to ensure that a person's wishes, reflective of his or her values, are followed at the end of life.

At my request staff from the Diocese of Rochester assisted in the development of the Community Conversations/Compassionate Care project. I encourage all Catholics, all people, to give thought and reflection to the type of care they wish to receive at the end of life. I encourage them to discuss their wishes with their families and decide whom they might want to act as their spokesperson should the need arise.

Life is the first right of the human person and as individuals and a community we must insist that every person has access to health care that affirms and sustains life. However, it is necessary for us to accept death as part of the human condition.

Catholics then, as they reflect on decisions that may need to be made at the end of life should consider that

- One is not obliged to use extraordinary means to maintain life when there is no reasonable hope of benefit or which involves excessive hardship.
- In the case of terminal illness it is permissible to alleviate suffering with painkillers that may carry the risk of shortening life, so long as the intent is to relieve pain rather than to cause death.
- The dignity of human life is inviolable, consequently physician assisted suicide and euthanasia are wrong.

The completion of advance care directives provides the gift of peace of mind for patient and family that the days at the end of life will be lived as the patient wishes. It is a kindness for families also to know an individual's desires before a medical crisis arises.

As we mark the start of this fall season, which teaches us that there is death and dying before the new life of spring, I encourage all in our community to complete advance care directives.