



Care for the Seriously Ill and Dying

As a Catholic health care service, in accordance with the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services of the United States Conference of Bishops, Our Lady of Peace provides a community of respect, love, and support to patients and their families as they face the reality of death. Reflections on the innate dignity of human life in all its dimensions as a precious gift from God and on the purpose of medical care is indispensable for formulating a true moral judgement about the use of technology to maintain life. The use of life-sustaining technology is judged in light of the Christian meaning of life, suffering, and death. In this way two extremes are avoided: on the one hand, an insistence on useless or burdensome technology even when a patient may legitimately wish to forgo it and, on the other hand, the withdrawal of technology with the intention of causing death.

Our Lady of Peace frequently offers care to persons who are in anticipation of imminent death from illness, accident, advanced age, or similar condition and provides them with appropriate opportunities to prepare for death. Persons who are in anticipation of imminent death shall be provided with such information as is necessary to help them understand their condition and to have the opportunity to discuss their condition with their family members and care providers. They shall also be offered appropriate medical information to make it possible to address the morally legitimate choices available to them. They shall be provided spiritual support as well as the opportunity to receive the sacraments in order to prepare well for death.

Our Lady of Peace adheres to the belief that a person has a moral obligation to use ordinary or proportionate means of preserving the person's life. Proportionate means are those that in the judgement of the person offer a reasonable hope of benefit and do not entail an excessive burden or impose excessive expense on the family or the community.

Our Lady of Peace also adheres to the belief that a person may forgo extraordinary or disproportionate means of preserving life. Disproportionate means are those that in the person's judgement do not offer a reasonable hope of a benefit or entail an excessive burden or impose excessive expense on the family or the community.



Our Lady of Peace recognizes its obligation as a Catholic health care service to offer its patients food and water, including medically assisted nutrition and hydration for those who cannot take food orally. This obligation extends to patients in chronic and presumably irreversible conditions (e.g. the “persistent vegetative state”) who can reasonably be expected to live indefinitely if given such care. However, Our Lady of Peace also recognizes that medically assisted nutrition and hydration become morally optional when they cannot reasonably be expected to prolong life or when they would be excessively burdensome for the patient or would cause significant physical discomfort, for example resulting from complications in the use of the means employed. For instance, as a patient draws close to inevitable death from an underlying progressive and fatal condition, certain measures to provide nutrition and hydration may become excessively burdensome and therefore not obligatory in light of their limited ability to prolong life or provide comfort.

The free and informed judgement made by a competent adult patient concerning the use or withdrawal of life-sustaining procedures shall be respected and normally complied with, unless it is contrary to Catholic moral teaching.

Euthanasia is an action or omission by a third party that of itself or by intention causes death in order to alleviate suffering. Our Lady of Peace does not condone and shall not participate in euthanasia or assisted suicide in any way. Dying patients who request euthanasia shall receive loving care, psychological and spiritual support, and appropriate remedies for pain and other symptoms so that they can live with dignity until the time of natural death.

Patients shall be kept as free of pain as possible so that they may die comfortably and with dignity, and in the place where they wish to die. Since a person has the right to prepare for the person’s death while fully conscious, a patient shall not be knowingly deprived of consciousness without a compelling reason. Medicines capable of alleviating or suppressing pain may be given to a dying patient, even if this therapy may indirectly shorten the patient’s life so long as the intent is not to hasten death. The Christian understanding of redemptive suffering shall be shared with patients experiencing suffering so that they become aware of the opportunity they have been provided.



The determination of death shall be made by a physician or competent medical authority in accordance with responsible and commonly accepted scientific criteria.

Our Lady of Peace shall encourage and provide the means whereby those who wish to do so may arrange for the donation of their organs and bodily tissue, for ethically legitimate purposes, so that they may be used for donation and research after death. Our Lady of Peace shall not permit such organs to be removed until it has been medically determined that the patient has died.