

To spend our final days on this earth in peace and comfort, surrounded by loved ones—that is the hope of each of us. In particular, Christian hope sees these final days as a time to prepare for our eternal destiny.

Today, however, many of us fear the dying process. We are afraid of being kept alive past life's natural limits by machines. We fear experiencing intolerable pain and suffering. We worry about being abandoned or becoming a burden on others.

Who doesn't want Compassion and Choices when it comes to end of life issues?

Who wouldn't want Death with Dignity?

These names though- Compassion and Choices, Death with Dignity- are seemingly innocent monikers used for the hidden evil of assisted suicide.

Right here in New Jersey, a bill has been introduced to allow physician-assisted suicide in patients deemed terminal with a predicted six months to live. As a physician, I can assure you that we're not that good at predictions. This is without consultation of a hospice expert or a psychiatrist. Family members do not need to be notified. Last Monday the bill was passed through a NJ senate committee and has a real chance of becoming law. A similar bill was previously passed in five other states (Vermont, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, and Hawaii).

An Example of where this can lead- "Barbara, a retired school bus driver, had been in remission from her lung cancer. When it recurred, her oncologist wanted her to be given a drug that (statistically) would increase the chance of her being alive in one year by 45%. The State of Oregon denied this treatment stating that her prognosis wasn't good enough to warrant expensive medication to treat her cancer. Yet in the same letter denying coverage for her medication, the State offered full 100% coverage for her assisted suicide."

Our society can be judged by how we respond to difficult, stressful times. A caring community devotes more attention, not less, to members facing the most vulnerable times in their lives. When people are tempted to see their own lives as diminished in value or meaning, that is the time they most need the love and assistance of others to assure them of their inherent worth.

The healing art of medicine is an important part of this assistance. Even when a cure is not possible, medicine plays a critical role in providing "palliative care"—alleviating pain and suffering and meeting basic needs. Such care should combine medical skill with attention to the emotional as well as spiritual needs of those facing the end of life.

The AMA (American Medical Association) states that physician-assisted suicide is fundamentally incompatible with the doctor's role as a healer. Jewish and Christian moral traditions have long rejected the idea of assisting in another's death.

Which brings us to the beginning side of this topic. The start of life.

We are concerned about breast cancer, heart disease, and addictions, and for good reason. And yet the leading cause of death in this country is abortion. To put the number in perspective- Almost 3,000 people lost their lives on 9/11. We abort 3,500 children every day. The Jewish holocaust, a terrible tragedy, claimed around 6 million lives. Over 61 million persons have been aborted in America since 1973. Planned Parenthood talks about protecting Women's Health. Think about the 30 million girls lost because of their actions.

What are the Top Three Reasons that we hear in support of abortion:

#1. A woman should be able to control her own body.

Absolutely true. A woman should always control her own body. No argument there. But that's not the case that we have here. We are all educated. We know that if you stop the beating heart of a woman, she dies. But when we stop the heartbeat of a fetus, the woman still lives. Common sense. We also know genetically that we are dealing with two completely separate and distinct human lives- the woman and the fetus. That has been proved without a doubt by modern science.

#2. Everyone has free will. Even if I believe this is wrong I can't tell someone else what to do.

Yes, we all have free will. We do not have a Creator who dictates every action taken by us.

In fact, our own Declaration of Independence states that we are all created equal, that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable Rights, and that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

But that very notion of free will then brings into account the reality of ethics. Everything flows from this primal right- the Right to Life. Without that no other rights are possible. No liberty if not alive. No happiness, no just wage, no housing, no healthcare. There are intrinsic or fundamental goods. Likewise, there are intrinsic evils, and choosing death for the unborn is an intrinsic evil.

#3. Planned Parenthood does a lot of other good things- women's health checkups, pap smears, breast cancer exams.

Lets look at a few facts- PP performed over 330,000 abortions last year (by their own report). Nearly 14% of everyone entering a PP clinic receives an abortion. But Planned Parenthood provides <10,000 "prenatal services" per year and <3000 referrals for adoptions at other agencies. So 96% of its services for pregnant women are abortions, outnumbering other options for the pregnancy over 26 to 1. It does not offer prenatal ultrasound screenings for fetal health. Their "screening" for breast cancer is a preliminary screen that a woman can usually do for herself—it offers no mammograms or biopsies. Women's comprehensive health needs are much better served by community health centers and other federally qualified health centers, which already serve over 24 million patients in both urban and rural areas.

We have been told that a fetus can't think or feel and can't survive on its own, so therefore it is not a person.

However, science has taught us that:

- receptors in the skin that sense an injury develop between 7.5 and 15 weeks of pregnancy
- nerve cells in the spinal cord that transmit that signal up to the brain are developed at around 19 weeks of pregnancy
- neurons (nerve cells) that extend from the spinal cord into the brain and to the area of the brain where pain is perceived occurs between 23 and 24 weeks

The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Act is a US Congress bill to ban late-term abortions nationwide after 20 weeks post-fertilization on the basis that the fetus is capable of feeling pain during an abortion from that point on.

The 20/20 Project is a postcard and petition campaign that enables the faithful throughout the Diocese to help save babies 20 weeks in the womb from abortion. It allows us to petition to our legislators and educate them on this important issue, with the goal of passage into law by the year 2020.

It also helps educate us because many of us might not be aware that abortion is legal through all nine months in New Jersey and most other states, and it helps us gain a network of people to fight for this cause. The United States is currently one of only seven countries that allows abortions beyond 20-weeks.

Please support the 20/20 project as well as other services that assist pregnant women, new mothers, and beyond- groups like Options for Women, Helpers of God's Precious Infants, First Way, Rachel's Vineyard, and others.

Human life is our most basic gift from a loving God. As responsible stewards of life, we must never directly intend to cause our own death or that of anyone else.