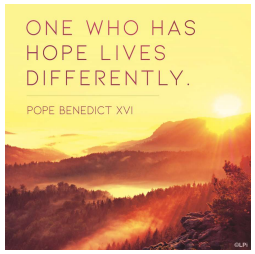
St. Louis Church
Pittsford, NY



From Suffering to Hope

Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunnicliff

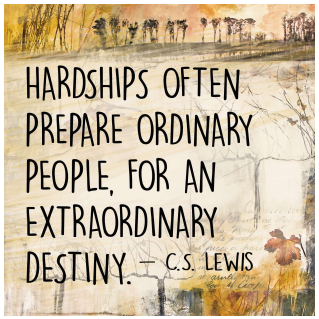
November 12 or 14, 2026

1



From Suffering to Hope

Opening Prayer



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Webinar Tips

- All participants are muted to reduce background noise
- If slides are not fully visible, check at the top center of your screen for "fit to window" under arrow.
- If you would like to ask a question, at the bottom of your screen you should see a box with the letters "Q & A". Click it and you can type your question. It will show on my screen.
- In addition to the slides, you should see a video of me. It should appear in the upper right of your screen. It should not block any significant content on the slides. If it does, you can drag it around.

3



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Why a Presentation on Suffering?

Ever since the first sin (the "original sin"), there has been suffering. Suffering has received new attention in the discussion about assisted suicide.

- Euthanasia – means "good death"
  - ***Dignity*** in dying
  - Active vs. ***Passive***
- Assisted Suicide
  - Patient takes their own life vs. doctor/nurse
  - Yet we have laws to prevent general "suicide"
- (Medical) Aid in Dying

4



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This presentation is not about the right and wrong of assisted suicide.

For that, please see my presentation,
Treating Life with Dignity and Love, Part III at
https://renewaloffaith.org/treating-life-with-dignity-and-love-part-iii/
covering morality, conscientious objection…

Part I covers dignity of life in general
https://renewaloffaith.org/treating-life-with-dignity-and-love-part-i/

5



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Let's acknowledge
where our emotions are at
for our emotions are real.

These are not easy decisions.

It's hard to talk about before, during, and after the critical times.

My mother's final days.

6



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Pope Francis on the Dignity of All Life

"Every human being has the right to live with dignity and to develop integrally; this fundamental right cannot be denied by any country. ***People have this right even if they are unproductive, or were born with or developed limitations***. This does not detract from their great dignity as human persons, ***a dignity based not on circumstances but on the intrinsic worth of their being***. Unless this basic principle is upheld, there will be no future either for fraternity or for the survival of humanity" (Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, 107, my emphasis).

7



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Suffering When We Start to Feel Useless

We are not defined by
what we can do

Pope Francis
"Ultimately, "persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected, especially when they are poor and disabled, 'not yet useful' - like the unborn, or 'no longer needed' - like the elderly" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 18).

8



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Life Has Value

United States of America
Declaration of Independence

"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are ***Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness***."

9



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Our Approach Must be One of Hope

- Someone might choose abortion or assisted suicide out of despair, in a dark moment
- Prayer of St. Francis

where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;

- Pope Francis, "We need a community that supports and helps us, in which we can help one another to keep looking ahead" (*Fratelli Tutti*, 8)

10



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A Better Perspective
A Moment of Grace

Bishop John Bonnici who wrote in his letter on July 29, 2026 to the people of our diocese,

"I have been ***privileged*** to ***accompany*** many people as they approached the end of their earthly lives."
When we do this, like Bishop Bonnici,
we can witness "***moments of extraordinary grace***" as families gather in love and with "peaceful trust in God's peace (Bishop Bonnici Letter to the Faithful, July 29, 2026, emphasis added).

11



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Have you heard the expression, "Offer It Up"?

When we speak of offering it up:

- "Surrender in suffering moves us from a stance of self-pitying to one of active participation in the saving work of Christ" (Krishner, *Spiritual Surrender.* 30.)

- "*Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in the afflictions of Christ on behalf of his body, which is the church*" (Colossians 1:24).

12



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Are We Looking for Hope or for Control?

"Our Christian faith calls us to be people of hope. Hope is very much needed in the world. Pope Francis knew this when he made hope the theme of our present jubilee year in the Catholic Church. ***However, if we seek to end suffering by prematurely ending a person's life, we are not looking for hope. It is control and/or to be pain-free that we are seeking. It is not necessarily bad to desire either control or to be pain-free. They only become bad when we use immoral means to achieve them.*** Hope is not about being in control or being pain-free. Hope is concerned with our attitude towards suffering. In fact, if one is in control and pain-free, one does not need hope." (Fr. Jeffrey S. Tunnicliff, "Finding Hope in Suffering," 6/3/25. emphasis added)

13



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Suffering

We want suffering to make sense.

Should It?

In the Book of Job in the Old Testament,
Job tried to make sense of his suffering.
In the end, he did not get all the answers he wanted
but he still had faith in God.

Suffering invites us in be in tune with reality and opens the door for us to look beyond our humanity to redemption.

14



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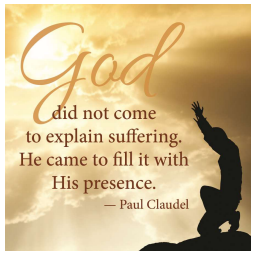
Suffering Can be Holy



"Who, though he was
in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God
something to be grasped.
Rather, ***he emptied himself****...*
he humbled himself,
becoming obedient to death,
even death on a cross.
Because of this,
God greatly exalted him."
(see Philippians 2:6-11)

15



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Hope Does Not End Suffering

It can be an ***opportunity*** for witness.

- "*It will lead to your giving testimony.*" (Luke 21:13).
- "When this body is gravely ill, totally incapacitated, and the person is almost incapable of living and acting, all the more do interior *maturity and spiritual greatness* become evident, constituting a touching lesson to those who are healthy and normal." (Pope St. John Paul II, *Salvifici Doloris*, 26)

16



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What Does Suffering Offer Us?

- "Suffering strengthens character; fosters conversion, and leads us to recognize and accept our dependence on God" (Shaw, *Does Suffering Make Sense".* 108).
- "The cross of Jesus doesn't just reveal God as unconditional love; it also reveals how vulnerability is the path to intimacy" (Rolheiser, *The Passion and the Cross. 35*).

17



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Types of Suffering

- There is suffering that can and should be eliminated, like hunger.
- There is physical suffering that comes with age, illness, or injury.
- There are people who suffer religious persecution.
- Assisted suicide as legalized in New York ***seems to focus*** on physical suffering (pain)
- "Suffering includes fear of the future, humiliation, anger, shame, loss of hope, abandonment, rejection, or despair" (Sherry A. Weddell, *Fruitful Discipleship: Living the Mission of Jesus in the Church and the World*. Huntington, IN:Our Sunday Visitor. 2017).

18



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Reasons Why Someone Might Choose Assisted Suicide

"From a clinical perspective, the factors that largely determine requests for euthanasia and assisted suicide are ***unmanaged pain***, and the ***loss of human and theological hope***, provoked by the often ***inadequate psychological and spiritual human assistance*** provided by those who care for the sick" (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Letter Samaritanus Bonus, On the Care of Persons* , Section 5.1. cf. USCCB, "Top Reasons to Oppose Assisted Suicide." 2017. https://www.usccb.org/prolife/top-reasons-oppose-assisted-suicide.).

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When a Machine Breaks

- We try to fix it
- If we cannot fix it, we try to keep it going
- If we cannot keep it going, we may discard it
- Dehumanization when "rehumanization" is needed.

We do not discard human beings.

- When a human being becomes ill
  - We see a doctor to be ***cured***, not to be ***fixed.***
- When we cannot cure them, we ***still accompany*** them - family helps…home health aide, assisted living, nursing home.
- When the end draws near, we do not kill them
  - Palliative Care, hospice, comfort care

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No One Wants to Be a ***Burden***

- "The person feels condemned to receive help and assistance from others, and at the same time seems useless to himself. The discovery of the salvific meaning of suffering in union with Christ *transforms* this depressing *feeling*" (*Salvific Doloris*, 27).

What Good Can Come from Suffering?

- "It is suffering, more than anything else, ***which clears the way for the grace which transforms human souls***. Suffering, more than anything else, makes present in the history of humanity the powers of the Redemption" (*Salvific Doloris*, 27, emphasis added).

21



From Suffering to Hope

The Garden – Pleasure and Suffering

"It's significant that this agony should take place in a garden. In archetypal literature, a garden is not a place to pick cucumbers and onions. Archetypally, a garden is *the place of delight*, the place of love, the place to drink wine, the place where lovers meet in the moonlight, the place of intimacy. The garden is paradise. That's why Adam and Eve in their paradisiacal state are described as being in a garden" (Fr. Rolheiser, *The Passion and the Cross*. 4. emphasis added).

Yet, Jesus' Passion, his ***suffering,*** began in a garden.

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What Was Jesus' Greatest Suffering?

Jesus was beaten, mocked, and crucified.

"No; his real pain is that of the lover who's been misunderstood and rejected in a way that is mortal and humiliating" (Fr. Rolheiser, *The Passion and the Cross*. *5*).

"'*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me*?" Jesus didn't die serenely, but struggling with doubt. Shouldn't his most committed followers expect a similar struggle" (Fr. Rolheiser, *The Passion*, 17).

23



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Suffering is Part of Humanity

- "It is a universal theme that accompanies man at every point on earth" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 2).
- Job – "His suffering is the suffering of someone who is innocent and it must be accepted as a mystery, which the individual is unable to penetrate completely by his own intelligence" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 11).
- "The field of human suffering is much wider, more varied, and multi-dimensional. Man suffers in different ways, ways not always considered by medicine, not even in its most advanced specializations. Suffering is something which is still wider than sickness, more complex and at the same time still more deeply rooted in humanity itself." (*Salvifici Doloris*, 5).

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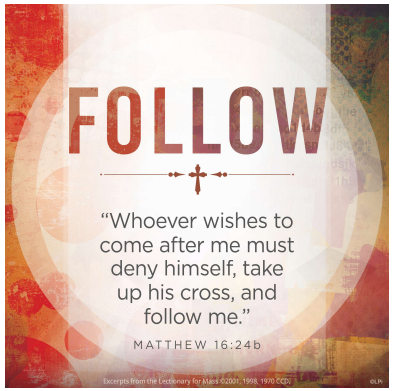

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The School of Suffering

- It can be cleansing (purgative). It is when we suffer ***with*** Jesus that the Cross can become real to us (Rev. Jim Willig (with Tammy Bundy), Lessons from the School of Suffering. Cincinnati: St, Anthony Messenger Press. 2001. 54)
- "*Not only that, but we even boast of our afflictions, knowing that affliction produces endurance, and endurance, proven character, and proven character, hope, and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy Spirit that has been given to us.*" (Romans 5:3-5).

26



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Suffering

"*There is an appointed time for everything…a time to tear down, and a time to build*" {Ecclesiastes 3:1-3).

→ "Suffering must serve *for conversion,* that is, *for the rebuilding of goodness* in the subject" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 12).

27



From Suffering to Hope

A New Light

"And even though the victory over sin and death achieved by Christ in his Cross and ***Resurrection does not abolish temporal suffering*** from human life, nor free from suffering the whole historical dimension of human existence, it nevertheless ***throws a new light*** upon this dimension and upon every suffering: the light of salvation. This is the light of the Gospel, that is, of the Good News" (*Salvifici Doloris*, 15. emphasis added).

Suffering becomes Holy when linked to love
(see *Salvifici Doloris*, 18).

28



From Suffering to Hope

Suffering

'It can be said that this is "substitutive" suffering; but above all it is "redemptive".' (*Salvifici Doloris*, 17).

29



From Suffering to Hope

Suffering as a Sacrifice for Redemption

- "The Redeemer suffered in place of man and for man. Every man has *his own share in the Redemption.* Each one is also *called to share in that suffering* through which the Redemption was accomplished. He is called to share in that suffering through which all human suffering has also been redeemed. In bringing about the Redemption through suffering, Christ *has* also *raised human suffering to the level of the Redemption.* Thus each man, in his suffering, can also become a sharer in the redemptive suffering of Christ." (*Salvifici Doloris*, 19).
- → Romans 12:1 – "*I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God,* ***to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship****. Do not conform yourselves to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and pleasing and perfect.*"

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Hope Changes Perspective

- Romans 8:18 – "*I consider that the sufferings of this present time are as nothing compared with the* ***glory*** *to be revealed for us.*"

31



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Accompaniment – Never Forgotten

Pope Francis, "We fail to realize that by isolating the elderly and leaving them in the care of others ***without the closeness and concern of family members***, we disfigure and impoverish the family itself. ***We also end up depriving young people*** of a ***necessary connection*** to their roots and a wisdom that the young cannot achieve on their own." (*Fratelli Tutti*, 14, my emphasis).

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Accompaniment – See the ***Person***

- Suffering can be isolating but it can also be reuniting (Rev. Wallig, 76)
- We need to see them for more than what they could do when they were healthy. They still have value when they are dying.
- As Jesus teaches, it is a Corporal Work of Mercy to visit the sick (Matthew 25:36).

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Accompaniment in the Bible

- Stations of the Cross – Those who accompanied Jesus.
  - Station 4 – Jesus meets his mother
  - Station 5 – Simon of Cyrene helps Jesus to carry his cross
  - Station 6 – Veronica wipes the face of Jesus

34



From Suffering to Hope

Tough Decisions
Pain Medications and Their Effects

"The Church nonetheless affirms the moral liceity of sedation as part of patient care in order to ensure that the end of life arrives with the greatest possible peace and in the best internal conditions. This holds also for treatments that hasten the moment of death (deep palliative sedation in the terminal stage), always, to the extent possible, with the patient's informed consent…***The sedation must exclude, as its direct purpose, the intention to kill, even though it may accelerate the inevitable onset of death***" (*Samaritanus Bonus*, Section 5.7).

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Instead of simply saying "no"
to assisted suicide,
we need
to say "yes" to Palliative Care
and other life-affirming care.
(Amanda Achtman at St. Bernard's presentations October 15 & 17, 2026)

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What is Palliative Care?

- Proper medical care has always included pain management.
- Palliative Care as a developing specialty involved relieving physical pain but, properly understood, it includes accompaniment, psychological care, as well as spiritual care.
- Palliative Care specialists see mostly terminally ill patients, but will see anyone with a "serious illness."

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Are Assisted Suicide Drugs Part of Palliative Care?

- ***No!***
- Assisted Suicide drugs offer no treatment. They do not heal life or affirm the person. These drugs ***end life***.
- Canadian hospital chaplain who said that he only refers to MAID "medical assistance in dying" as PAID "poison assisted in dying"
- A Palliative Care specialist has called these drugs unethical
- Death is not always immediate.

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"Eliminate the Problem, Not the Patient

Palliative care also addresses symptoms beyond physical pain, in ways that go beyond medication. Patients facing serious illness may feel hopeless and depressed, as though their lives have lost meaning. ***Addressing psychological, emotional, and spiritual problems is essential to palliative care***. ***Assisted suicide alleviates none of these problems, but gives in to them***. Consider that about half of patients who had requested assisted suicide under the Oregon law in its first three years changed their minds when the doctor provided palliative care" (USCCB, "Killing the Pain, Not the Patient: Palliative Care vs. Assisted Suicide. 2018, emphasis added).

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Assisted Suicide as a Threat to Palliative Care and Your Care

"Threatens Improvement of Palliative Care
There is compelling evidence that legalizing assisted suicide undermines efforts to maintain and improve good care for patients nearing the end of life, including patients who never wanted assisted suicide." (USCCB, "Top Reasons", USCCB source - "Vermont VNA Seeking to Identify Causes of State's Low Hospice Utilization Rates," *Hospice and Palliative Care News*, April 29, 2015, at https://healthrespubs.com/hospice-and-palliative-care-news/2015/04/29/vermont-vna-seeking-to-identify-low-hospice-utilization-rates/. J. Ballentine et al., "Physician-Assisted Death Does Not Improve End-of-Life Care," *Journal of Palliative Medicine* 19 (2016): 1-2.).

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Spiritual Care in Suffering

"Pastoral Care is integral to both palliative care and hospice care, and includes ***making available the Eucharist***, Confession, Anointing of the Sick, and Viaticum. It also includes supportive prayer and support for decision makers" (USCCB, "Catholic Considerations for Our Earthly Passing. https://www.usccb.org/committees/pro-life-activities/catholic-considerations-our-earthly-passing. Emphasis added)

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Palliative Care

Comfort Care

Hospice

(Hospice homes in Canada are being required to provide assisted suicide. This goes against what hospice is meant to be.)

42



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What help is there for family and friends who serve as caregivers?

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Ordinary Care

"It is not lawful to suspend treatments that are required to maintain essential physiological functions, ***as long as the body can benefit*** from them (such as ***hydration***, ***nutrition***, ***thermoregulation***, proportionate ***respiratory support***, and the other types of assistance needed to maintain bodily homeostasis and manage systemic and organic pain)." (*Samaritanus Bonus,* Section 5.2, my emphasis).

Feeding tube = gastrostomy tube

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Why is a feeding tube required but not a ventilator?

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When It is Time

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith,
Letter Samaritanus Bonus, On the Care of Persons

"In the specific case of ***aggressive*** medical treatment, it should be repeated that the ***renunciation*** of ***extraordinary*** and/or ***disproportionate*** means "is ***not*** the equivalent of suicide or euthanasia; it rather expresses the ***acceptance*** of the human condition in the face of death" (Section 5.2, quote from *Evangelium Vitae*, 65, my emphasis).

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Letting God Choose the Time

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2278

"Discontinuing medical procedures that are burdensome, ***dangerous***, ***extraordinary***, or ***disproportionate*** to the expected outcome can be legitimate; it is the refusal of ***"over-zealous"*** treatment. ***Here one does not will to cause death; one's inability to impede it is merely accepted***. The decisions should be made by the patient if he is competent and able or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for the patient, whose reasonable will and legitimate interests must always be respected."

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The Tough Discussion

- We often dread talking about our wishes for medical care with our family and/or friends as well as our health care workers.
- It can be difficult but it is not meant to be a burden. It is meant to be ***a gift***. Without this discussion, they face the possibility of having to make decisions for you without knowing what you want.

Handout
"The Tough Discussion: A Gift Rather Than a Burden"

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Informed Consent

- Doctors used to make the decision for the patient without consent as we now know it (Rachel Hajar, M.D., "The Physicians Oath: Historical Perspectives." Cardiology Department, Heart Hospital, Doha, Qatar. Heart View, Volume 18, Issue 4, October – December 17) (https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5755201/) (155)
- "At the heart of *informed consent* is respect for a person's dignity. It requires that the patient must have adequate reasoning and be in possession of all relevant facts about the proposed treatment" (Hajar, 154)
- "The notion of informed consent is relatively recent…Traditionally, doctors have been under the impression that the patient does not understand very well his/her disease or his/her physical condition. Thus, it was deemed necessary that physicians make decisions for their patients" (155).

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The Hippocratic Oath Has Changed

- From "do not harm" and "do not take a life" to saying the doctors "have the power to take a life."
- The classical version(s) included
  - "to give no deadly medicine to any one if asked"(Hajar, 156).
  - "I will neither give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it, nor will I make a suggestion to this effect" (156).
- "Of note is that, in the modern version of the oath, there is no prohibition against abortion; there is no promise by the physician to "do no harm" or never give a "lethal medicine" as in the original Hippocratic Oath" (Hajar, 157).
- Modern "I will remember that there is art to medicine as well as science, and that warmth, sympathy, and understanding may outweigh the surgeon's knife or the chemist's drug" (Hajar, 157).

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Important Terms

- DNR – Do not resuscitate
- MOLST - Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (Living Will is a related document here)
- Health Care Proxy (HCP) – legal document

The first two are important to document your wishes. The third is the most important because each situation needs to be individually examined in light of what recovery looks like.

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Finger Lakes Guild
Catholic Medical Association

We fulfill our mission by:

- Upholding the principals of the Catholic faith in the science and practice of medicine.
- Assisting the Church in the work of communicating Catholic medical ethics to the medical profession and society at large.
- Supporting Catholic hospitals and health care institutions to faithfully apply Catholic moral principals in health care delivery.
- Providing Catholic health care providers the opportunity to become better acquainted, and to work together with deeper mutual support and understanding.

https://www.fingerlakescma.org/

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Related Articles on My Website

- "Finding Value in Suffering," June 3, 2025) https://renewaloffaith.org/finding-value-in-suffering/
- "The Beginning and the End," November 19, 2024 - https://renewaloffaith.org/the-beginning-and-the-end/
- "Towards a Culture of Life," January 28, 2025 - https://renewaloffaith.org/towards-a-culture-of-life/

Related Video Series on my website

- *Treating Life with Dignity and Love, Spring 2021. https://renewaloffaith.org/treating-life-with-dignity-and-love/*

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Resources (cont'd)

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