

INITIATIVE 1000

Compassion and care or lethal Rx?

My dear friends in Christ,

As Catholics we have a duty to bring our faith and values into the public square in order to build a just society. In the coming election, this responsibility will assume particular urgency because of Initiative 1000, which would change current law that now prohibits physician-assisted suicide.

This initiative has a clearly moral dimension for all of us who are disciples of Christ. It also could have dramatic consequences for the culture. This special edition of The Catholic Northwest Progress contains information that you will find helpful in learning more about Initiative 1000 and its impact on the most vulnerable among us. You will learn that those most at risk from this change in public policy are elderly persons, those without adequate health care, people with disabilities and those who feel they are a burden to others.

Because God alone has sovereignty over the sacred gift of life, Catholic teaching upholds the dignity of every human person regardless of frailty or social definitions of usefulness. Initiative 1000 would permit doctors to prescribe an overdose of drugs to terminally-ill patients so they could end their own lives. This poses a serious threat to vulnerable persons already at risk of marginalization by the utilitarian perspective of our secular culture.

We as members of society have a responsibility to promote compassion and care for people suffering from terminal illnesses, always striving to give them hope and alleviating their fear and pain. Catholic health care knows from experience with hospice and palliative care that the pain of terminally-ill patients can be controlled in 98 percent of all cases. Our participation as faithful citizens responsible for establishing and maintaining laws that respect life must always seek to protect those confronting death. That means we must be committed to alleviating suffering, not eliminating the sufferer.

Assisted suicide is totally contrary to Catholic tradition and teaching, but a careful analysis of Initiative 1000 also reveals that it is bad law. Under terms of I-1000, persons who are depressed could request an overdose of drugs without being required to have a mental evaluation, and there is no requirement for family notification. As a result, the spouse or loved ones of a terminally-ill patient may not be aware that they are contemplating suicide until they are already dead. In addition, this dramatic change in civil law raises the specter of health insurance companies and even family members placing financial gain ahead of the sanctity and value of human life.

After prayerfully and carefully considering what this initiative would do, I have concluded that it is dangerous to the vulnerable and does not promote the common good. I am voting no, but I am not telling you how to vote. I ask that you inform your own consciences about church teaching as well as the implications for society before voting on this measure. I also urge you to put your faith into action by exercising your responsibility as citizens to vote in the coming election.

With warmest regards and wishes, I remain

Your friend in Christ,

Most Rev. Alex J. Brunett
Archbishop of Seattle