

UNDERSTANDING THE CATHOLIC DECLARATION ON LIFE AND DEATH BULLETIN EXCERPTS

Note to Bulletin Coordinator:

Please add to each bulletin announcement: "For a copy of the *Catholic Declaration on Life and Death*, go to www.dovrespectlife.org or call 941-441-1112." You can call the number and order a supply so you can make them available in the church/parish office or you can print them yourself.

Do you have a Catholic Living Will?

The *Catholic Declaration on Life and Death* is a health care advance directive for Florida's Catholics and is approved by the Bishops of Florida. This directive conforms to both Florida law and the teaching of the Church.

What Is an Advance Directive?

A health care advance directive is a written or oral statement made and witnessed in advance of serious illness or injury to address medical situations that may arise when a person becomes unable to make one's own decisions. Executing an advance directive exercises good stewardship over the gift of life.

Forms of Advance Directives

There are two forms of advance directives: the *designation of health care surrogate*, which authorizes a person to make decisions for the incapacitated patient, and the *living will*, which gives instructions to physicians and caregivers regarding medical care and treatment at the end of life. The *Catholic Declaration on Life and Death* merges both forms into one directive.

Are you 18 or Older?

Every adult, 18 years of age or older, should choose at least one health care surrogate and designate this choice in writing. Unexpected health crises often involve complex treatment options, and having a surrogate who is prepared and authorized to make decisions for the patient helps to ensure the patient's wishes are respected.

Choosing your Health Care Surrogate

A health care surrogate should be chosen carefully as someone who will represent the patient's wishes regarding medical care and treatment or act in the patient's best interest if those wishes are unknown .

Living Wills

The "Living Will" section of the Catholic Declaration on Life and Death gives the surrogate a basic framework for understanding the patient's wishes regarding end-of-life care or treatment.

Plan Now for Future Medical Needs

Discussing goals, hopes, options and concerns with one's health care surrogate and family will provide the surrogate helpful information and can comfort all involved if and when future decisions are made on one's behalf.

Living Wills

A living will specifies one's wishes should a person become unable to express those wishes at the time health care decisions are needed at the end of life.

Do You Have a Catholic Living Will?

There are many forms of living wills, some of which are not consistent with Catholic teaching. The Bishops of Florida approved a revised Catholic Declaration on Life and Death in 2006 which includes a living will and designation of a health care surrogate.

Living Will Additions

Space is provided in the Catholic Declaration on Life and Death to add personal directions. Caution and care should be taken in making additions, as certain instructions set in writing could be problematic in some unforeseen circumstances. For instance, a particular treatment that may not be desirable long term could be life saving and health-restoring when used for a short time.

Making Medical Decisions

One is obliged to use "ordinary" (proportionate) means to preserve life. However, one may forego "extraordinary" (disproportionate) means - those that in the patient's judgment do not offer a reasonable hope of benefit, entail excessive burden or entail excessive expense to the family or community.

Health Care Planning

The best way to make sure wishes are known and followed is to designate and prepare one's own surrogate in advance of a medical emergency.