

CAPITOL

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REPORT



The Newsletter of the
Wisconsin Catholic Conference

Bishops Address Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment

In their recent statement, "Upholding the Dignity of Human Life," the Catholic bishops of Wisconsin warn against the use of Physician (or Provider) Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST).

POLST is a preset form that establishes medical orders to withhold or administer treatments. When signed by certain designated health care professionals, the form dictates whether to withhold or administer treatments such as cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR), antibiotics, or nutrition and hydration.

Affirming that "[e]very human being, created in the image and likeness of God, has profound dignity," the bishops stressed that, "[t]hroughout our lives we must always make choices that respect the dignity of every human life from the moment of fertilization to natural death."

Noting that the use of POLST has grave implications for human dignity, the bishops observed, "[a] POLST form presents options for treatments as if they were morally neutral. In fact, they are not. Because we cannot predict the future, it is difficult to

determine in advance whether specific medical treatments, from an ethical perspective, are absolutely necessary or optional."

"A POLST oversimplifies these decisions and bears the real risk that an indication may be made on it to withhold a treatment that, in particular circumstances, might be an act of euthanasia. Despite the possible benefits of these documents, this risk is too grave to be acceptable."

The bishops also took issue with the form's use, citing its possible conflict with an individual's wishes, Wisconsin law, and hospital or practitioner ethics. The bishops pointed to several deficiencies, including the form's lack of a patient signature and the absence of a conscience clause to protect facilities or practitioners.

The bishops stated that, "[d]ue to the serious and real threats to the dignity of human life that POLST and all similar documents present, we encourage all Catholics to avoid using all such documents, programs, and materials. The POLST form should not be regarded as the standard model for designating treatment preferences."

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Director's Corner

John Huebscher, Executive Director

Often I hear people cite James Joyce's description of the Catholic Church as "here comes everybody." This truism strikes me most vividly as I stand in line for communion at Mass. It is there I observe – and feel part of – the Catholic family in all its diversity.

The fact that "everybody" is present and welcome at Mass should be on all our minds as we discuss and react to caustic political ads and commentary over the next two months. When we are tempted to accept or engage in similar rhetoric, we should recall those whom we see at Mass.

Before we blame society's ills on "left-wing Democrats" or "right-wing Republicans," we should remember that adherents of both parties sit in the pews with us.

Before we attack the rich as unwilling to pay their fair share of taxes, we should think of the affluent parishioner kneeling with us during the Consecration who gives generously of her time and treasure to support our parishes and Catholic agencies.

Before we lambaste public employees as overpaid and the cause of high taxes, we should recall the teachers reciting the Creed with us who volunteer as catechists, and the police and firefighters joining us in the Prayers of the Faithful who protect our churches and communities.

Before we embrace harsh policies toward immigrants who aren't here legally, we should consider the farm worker next to us who offers us a "handshake of peace."

Before we suggest that those who resist cuts to defense spending prefer violence to peace, we should think of the woman and her children in the next pew praying for a husband and father serving in Afghanistan.

The bonds that unite this diverse and noisy family that is our Church far exceed our political divisions. Let's strive to recall that over the next eight weeks.

Election Season Guidelines

In every election year, Catholics and staff in Catholic institutions discern how to participate in the political process as "faithful citizens." The Wisconsin Catholic Conference's "Guidelines for Church Involvement in Electoral Politics" provides clarification and examples of what is and is not permissible for these entities.

Here is a partial list of both types of political activity:

Recommended

- Publish and distribute issue materials without reference to specific candidates or political parties.
- Conduct voter registration campaigns and "get-out-the-vote" campaigns.
- Encourage Catholics to become involved in political activities.
- Organize committees for political education.
- Develop legislative networks to review legislative activity and monitor the positions of elected officials.
- Make church facilities available for multi-issue candidate forums.
- Encourage attendance at public forums.
- Develop parish committees to help those with disabilities and/or elders to vote.
- Assist non-English speaking persons to register to vote and to learn about issues.
- Organize letter-writing campaigns on legislative issues.
- Develop special outreach programs to help the disadvantaged in the electoral process.

Prohibited

- Endorsing or opposing candidates or parties.
- Distributing materials that support or oppose candidates on Church property.
- Using Church facilities or resources (including websites) to produce such materials.
- Evaluating candidates in writing or in speech (such as homilies).

Interested readers are encouraged to visit the WCC's Resources page on its website, www.wisconsinatholic.org, to view the full Guidelines or a short summary (offered in both English and Spanish).

WCC, Other Church Leaders Call for Civility in Public Debates

As the November General Election draws near, religious leaders around the nation are urging their members to become politically engaged in a civil and constructive manner.

Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York is supporting an initiative of the Knights of Columbus to gather signatures for a Civility in America petition. The petition reads: "We, the undersigned citizens of the United States of America, respectfully request that candidates, the media and other advocates and commentators involved in the public policy arena employ a more civil tone in public discourse on political and social issues, focusing on policies rather than on individual personalities. For our part, we pledge to make these principles our own." (www.civilityinamerica.org)

Here in Wisconsin, our Catholic bishops this past July issued a letter to the faithful, encouraging "all faithful citizens to model civility." The bishops wrote: "So many of the political, social, and economic challenges we face today require cooperation and shared responsibility. They require thoughtful and respectful dialogue, especially with people with whom we disagree. Disagreements will always exist, but a measure of our character is how we pursue justice and peace in spite of our differences. For the good of our nation and our Church, let us recommit ourselves to studying the Church's teaching and applying it in a truthful, responsible, and civil manner." This letter and other *Faithful Citizenship* materials are available on the WCC website, www.wisconsincatholic.org.

The Wisconsin Council of Churches is also calling for a Season of Civility to encourage open and respectful discussion of the serious issues confronting our state and nation (<http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/season-of-civility/>).

Support for civility does not diminish a commitment to truth, justice, and peace. Indeed, St. Paul teaches that civility is essential to the Christian life: "Always be ready to give an explanation to anyone who asks you for a reason for your hope, but do it with gentleness and reverence..." (1 Peter 3:15) Civility requires that we understand and articulate the reasonable principles of our Catholic faith and social teaching.

WCC staff is available for parishes that want to learn more about Catholic social teaching and faithful citizenship. To schedule a presentation in your parish, contact us at office@wisconsincatholic.org.

WCC LAUNCHES FACEBOOK PAGE

As it has before, the WCC is employing new technologies to reach out to more people. The WCC is joining the world of social media and launching its own Facebook page. The page will provide its viewers with background information and resources regarding legislation, news, and other WCC activities. In addition, the page will provide an interactive forum for thoughtful commentary on policy issues of interest to Catholics in Wisconsin. WCC staff hopes its Facebook page will serve as a useful resource to Wisconsin Catholics who want to become informed participants in efforts to further the Church's public policy positions. Our Facebook page is publicly available and we welcome you to become a fan!

CAPITOL REPORT is published quarterly by the WCC to inform Catholics and policy decision makers of the WCC's activities and positions on state and federal legislation.

Wisconsin Catholic Conference

131 W. Wilson Street, Suite 1105
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608/257-0004 Fax: 608/257-0376
E-mail: office@wisconsincatholic.org
Website: www.wisconsincatholic.org

WCC Staff

John Huebscher, Executive Director
Cathy Coyle-Kaufmann, Administrative Assistant
Barbara Sella, Associate Director for Respect Life/Social Concerns
Kim Wadas, Associate Director for Education/Health Care

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The bishops, however, affirmed advance care planning generally and suggested the use of a different instrument.

“We encourage all persons to use a durable power of attorney for health care. For those who are age 18 or older, completing this document allows you to appoint a trusted person to make health care decisions on your behalf if a situation arises in which you cannot make these decisions for yourself. It is important to discuss your wishes and Catholic teaching with the person whom you appoint and to choose someone who will make health care decisions based on these principles.”

The statement also acknowledged the Church’s stance on what is permissible regarding medical treatment. The bishops referenced the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*:

“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. (CCC, no. 2278)”

Clarifying that as a general norm, “food and water should always be provided, even if delivered by artificial means,” the bishops explained when artificial nutrition and hydration are “morally optional.” They also directed those interested in obtaining more information on care and treatment issues to their earlier publication, *Now and at the Hour of Our Death*.

Both the bishops’ statement on “Upholding the Dignity of Human Life” and *Now and at the Hour of Our Death* are available through the Wisconsin Catholic Conference website, www.wisconsincatholic.org.

SAVE THE DATE!

 *Catholics at the Capitol* 

April 10, 2013

Monona Terrace Community &
Convention Center
Madison, WI

Please join us for this day-long event.
More details in upcoming *Capitol Reports* and
at www.wisconsincatholic.org.