

Legislative Report

SPIRITUALITY COMMISSION SUBCOMMITTEE

December 2015

Saving Our Life and Freedom

It was my pleasure to attend the NCCW Convention on behalf of the Madison Diocese and the Sauk Vicariate. The convention was filled with wonderful speakers, uplifting messages, and great liturgies.

One speaker, however, shared some very disturbing news on the "Right to Life." The National Council of Catholic Women (NCCW) has been very strong and passionate supporters of the Right to Life. Now, there is a very strong movement sweeping across America that is affecting not just the unborn but individuals who are faced with a terminal illness or long-term health conditions such as ALS and Alzheimer's.

Richard Doerflinger, associate director of the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), spoke on "Fighting Assisted Suicide: The Life and Freedom We Save May be Our Own."

The Hemlock Society USA was a national right-to-die organization formed in 1980. Since that date, the organization changed its name to *End of Life Choices* in 2002, and in 2003 merged with another organization to become *Compassion & Choices*.

On November 1, 2014, Brittany Lauren Maynard took her own life "when the time seemed right" after being diagnosed with terminal brain cancer. Organizations such as *Compassion & Choices* provided financial support on her journey as she moved from California to Oregon where assisted suicide was legal.

Washington, Vermont, Oregon, and Montana have legalized physician-assisted suicide. California also approved physician-assisted suicide in October 2015. New Mexico passed physician-assisted suicide in 2014, but the Court of Appeals ruled against the decision in September 2015. Bills have been introduced in 25 jurisdictions including Wisconsin.

In most instances, the physician decides who qualifies, who is terminal and controls all reporting. Why should we worry?

- Many times individuals are clinically depressed, believe they have lost their dignity, and believe they are "a burden on others."
- Witnesses may have a financial motive in the patient's death, i.e. family, heirs, or health facility. It may be a result of elder abuse in society.
- Individuals may have governmental insurance or no insurance at all, have only Medicaid and/or Medicare, and are unable to seek treatment alternatives to increase their quality of life, provide better pain management, etc.
- Government has removed legal protections afforded to other's lives, which include removal of provisions in California to protect a hospital from denying assisted suicide.
- Median age is 71 (less than one percent are under 35).

Why must we pray against assisted-suicide and contact our legislators? At some point in time, our physician may make a decision that affects our life. We may not be able to make a decision on our own, and others will make a life-and-death decision for us, whether because of pain, suffering, mental incapacity, or lack of or limited medical insurance. The decision to survive and fight to live may not be in our hands but rather be an economic decision. As Mr. Doerflinger noted, "The life and freedom we save may be our own."

Coreen S. Marklein

Legislative Chair

