



WISCONSIN CATHOLIC CONFERENCE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CATHOLIC BISHOPS RELEASE NEW EDITION OF PASTORAL LETTER ON END OF LIFE DECISIONS

On November 2, All Souls' Day, Wisconsin's Catholic bishops will release the 4th edition of their pastoral letter on end of life decisions, [*Now and at the Hour of Our Death*](#). The letter voices the bishops' concern and compassion for those facing critical life and death decisions and shares a moral framework for making such decisions.

Like the previous editions, the 4th edition of the pastoral letter is both a planning tool and a moral guide to prepare for the end of life and to relieve some of the pain, sadness, and anxiety that dying entails. It urges Catholics to prepare in advance for future medical care and end of life decisions through advance care planning. It addresses the challenges faced by society today, noting the mounting threat of assisted suicide and euthanasia. The letter also provides moral guidance on the Church's teaching regarding various treatment measures, such as life support, nutrition and hydration, pain management, and overly aggressive medical treatment. Finally, it provides guidance to specific groups, such as health care professionals, ministers, and families who face these questions daily, as they strive to serve those who are experiencing suffering and death.

"The Conference issued the first edition of this pastoral letter in 2002. That edition and the ones that followed have proven to be our most frequently requested resource," explained Wisconsin Catholic Conference Executive Director Barbara Sella. "Since the 3rd edition was published in 2013, we have seen new developments in the final disposition of human remains. The bishops wanted to respond to these developments to ensure that Catholics understand the need to properly respect the human body and the final wishes of the deceased."

The 4th edition includes a new section on "Funeral Arrangements and Final Disposition of Bodily Remains," which addresses new practices, such as alkaline hydrolysis and human composting, and explains why these do not respect the dignity of the human person. As an alternative, the Church offers Catholic green burials, in which the shrouded body is lowered directly into the ground. Additionally, the bishops have created a new legal document, *Catholic Authorization for Final Disposition*, which can ensure that believers receive a Catholic funeral and are laid to rest in a sacred space.

"In the unity of body and soul," the bishops write, "the human person was created 'in the image of God' (Gn 1:26-27); that innate dignity is reflected through our human bodies. 'The body is not something that is used temporarily by the soul as a tool and that can ultimately be discarded as no longer useful.'"

Catholics are encouraged to read the pastoral letter, bring it to prayer, and begin important conversations with loved ones. As the bishops write, "We pray that you do not wait until you or a

loved one is near death to reflect on the issues we must all confront at the end of life. Now is the time to talk through these issues with your family and anyone you might designate to make end of life decisions on your behalf.”

The bishops note that when a Catholic funeral is properly planned, it “will reflect the Church's faith and sure hope in the resurrection of the body on the last day, as well as the faith of the one who has died.”

The bishops add that *Now and at the Hour of Our Death* “could not have been possible without a generous grant from the Knights of Columbus Wisconsin State Council. We are deeply indebted to them.”

The English and Spanish versions of the pastoral letter and accompanying legal documents are available online at www.wisconsinatholic.org/endoflife. The website also contains promotional materials for church bulletins and social media, along with frequently asked questions.

Printed copies of the English and Spanish pastoral letter are available from your diocese.

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