

CCB Update – May 2005

Update from the Director on End-of-Life Issues...

The outcome of the Terri Schiavo case disturbed many of us who believe that human life is sacred.

On April 22, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS) Sanctity of Human Life Committee sent out an email statement to all members of the LCMS about the End-Of-Life Decisions. Since I am a member of that committee, I wanted all supporters of the CBI to have a copy of the statement. Here it is verbatim.

To: The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod

From: LCMS Sanctity of Human Life Committee

Subject: A Statement on End-Of-Life Decisions

Date: April 22, 2005

Recent events in the national headlines have initiated a dialogue among many Americans regarding end of life issues. Many LCMS clergy and laity have found themselves in the midst of this emotional debate, while sometimes struggling for clarity on these various issues themselves.

As Christians, we need to recognize this unique opportunity to become Christ's serving hands and to provide the needed spiritual, emotional, and physical palliative care at the end of a person's earthly life. We can consider it an honor to participate in someone else's preparation for eternal life.

The LCMS Sanctity of Human Life Committee would like to suggest some helpful resources along with the following principles to guide our thoughts on these complex issues.

The idea of a "living will" has become almost synonymous with "Advance Medical Directive" in the minds of many. An Advance Medical Directive is any type of document that determines treatment if a person loses their ability to make those decisions. A Living Will is a *type* of Advance Directive, but Christians must be aware that not all living wills are created equal and distinctions need to be made. We can acknowledge the legitimacy of these Advanced Medical Directives but we must also bear in mind the problems that can arise from their abuse.

Living wills can often deprive people of the important conversations that should be happening at life's end between the patient's family, medical professionals, and clergy. We cannot, unequivocally, determine beforehand our plan of care and successfully anticipate every circumstance, situation, and medical technology that might arise. Instead, every circumstance needs to be closely examined *when* it arises, tied closely to pastoral care and counseling, in order to determine and evaluate God-pleasing action for withholding treatment.

With this in mind, the LCMS Sanctity of Human Life Committee suggests that Christians consider making use of the Health Care Durable Power of Attorney. This legal document allows someone to designate a specific person to make health care decisions for him or her if they become incapacitated. This "health care proxy" can, and should, be someone who shares the patient's values and belief system.

While Christians can disagree on how ethics apply to individual cases, we can never disagree on the basic principles relative to the intrinsic value of each individual life. The Rev. Dr. Richard Eyer, in his book *Holy People, Holy Lives: Law and Gospel in Bioethics*, states that there is certainly a time when it is appropriate to withdraw treatment. "No one should be required to receive treatment that is futile or burdensome," he says, "but the word "futile" should be taken at face value-meaning "treatment that offers little or no benefit.?" However, treatment cannot be called futile if it sustains a God-given life (even if it is not a life someone would choose) such as food and water for a coma or brain-disabled patient.

Asking, "Will this treatment benefit the life this patient *has*?" is a worthy question to be posed in these difficult situations. Contrast this to the question our society tempts us to ask: "Is this patient's life a beneficial one; a life worth living?" Another way to phrase the question is "Are we aiming toward life, or are we aiming toward death in our healthcare decisions?"

As Christians continue to aim at upholding the value of human life, we glorify God-the designer of life. We give thanks that God has underscored the value and uniqueness of our human life

(which is not diminished by age or infirmity) when He endured such pain and suffering in His death to restore eternal life to mankind.

To be sure, this is a difficult and often confusing area of human existence. People have, and will continue to make mistakes in their decision-making. But Christ's death and resurrection offer forgiveness and comfort for all our decisions and actions in the past, present, and future. We can look to the cross and find relief and forgiveness for our burdened consciences and forgiveness for all sin, known and unknown.

To assist pastors and laity in their healthcare decisions LCMS Life Ministries recommends the following resources:

Lutherans For Life, 1-888-364-LIFE, <http://www.lutheransforlife.org>.

LCMS Life Ministries 1-800-248-1930, <http://worldrelief.lcms.org>.

Christian Life Resources, 1-414-774-1331, www.christianliferesources.com.

That They May Live, LCMS President's Commission on the Sanctity of Life.

Holy People, Holy Lives: Law and Gospel in Bioethics, Rev. Richard C. Eyer, (Concordia Publishing House).

Bioethics: A Primer for Christians, 2nd ed. Rev. Dr. Gilbert Meilaender, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005).

Christian Care at Life's End, LCMS Commission on Theology and Church Relations, (Concordia Publishing House).

Playing God: Redesigning Life, a Bible study by Rev. Dr. Robert Weise, (Concordia Publishing House).

Update on the Concordia Center for Bioethics (Abbreviated CBI)...

Dr. Voss spoke to the Lutherans for Life Convention for the State of Illinois on April 2 held in Belvidere, IL. The topic of his presentation was "The Christian and End-of-Life Decision Making." On April 12, 2005, the CBI and Columbia St. Mary's Hospital System held a joint bioethics conference which discussed the role medical paternalism plays in healthcare and professional practice. Dr. Voss has also been busy participating in several community projects and speaking to local Lutherans for Life and church groups. On behalf of LCMS World Relief and Human Care, Dr. Voss traveled to Madagascar during late February and early March. Watch for future issues of *CBI Bioethics Update* describing that enlightening trip!

CBI Needs: Prayer for Kevin Voss and for the work of the CBI; Secretarial help; Necessary office supplies; Bioethics library; *CBI Bioethics Update* video; CBI brochure; Costs for hosting annual bioethics conferences; and website maintenance. If you would like to help support the mission of the Concordia Center for Bioethics, please contact us. We need your help! Thrivent matching funds are available for donations to the CBI.

Update on Upcoming Events...

November 11, 2005: LCMS Sanctity of Life Committee, Lutherans for Life, and the CBI co-sponsor a national bioethics conference at the Sheraton Westport Lakeside Chalet, St. Louis, Missouri.

The Concordia Center for Bioethics offers a unique approach to bioethics that equips personal and professional decision making through spiritual guidance, competent teaching, insightful research, and needed resources.