



What is Palliative Care?

Palliative care is the Catholic response to end-of-life care. It affirms that every human life is sacred despite any illness. It is compassionate both towards individuals and their families.

Christ taught us that life has value, even in the midst of severe illness and poverty. Palliative care respects the value of life and seeks to provide comfort and care as illness progresses.

While pain management is a large part of palliative care, it is multi-faceted, addressing the physical, psychological, emotional, social, and spiritual wellbeing of individuals and their families.

Palliative care is flexible. It can be used during the earlier stages of an illness, with treatments aimed at a cure, or at end-of-life when a cure is not possible.

Palliative care is for adults and children, and can take place at the hospital, at home, in long-term care homes and hospices.

Resources

HopeLine: 416-619-5700

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If you are in search of locating hospice **palliative care resources and services** in your community, call the HopeLine at 416-619-5700 - leave your name and phone number and we will return your call as soon as possible. Please note: this service is an information line and is not an emergency or crisis line. In case of an emergency please call 911.

www.archtoronto.org/HopeLine

For additional palliative care resources please visit:

Archdiocese of Toronto -
Palliative Care (End-of-Life Care)
www.archtoronto.org/PalliativeCare

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops -
Horizons of Hope: A Toolkit for Catholic Parishes on Palliative Care
<https://bit.ly/HorizonsOfHope>

Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops -
Palliative Care
<https://bit.ly/PalliativeCareCCCB>

References

1. Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2324-2325.
2. Pope Francis, To the participants in the Symposium "Towards a Narrative of Hope: An International Interfaith Symposium on Palliative Care" Toronto, 21-23 May 2024 (vatican.va)
3. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Samaritanus bonus* on the care of persons in the critical and terminal phases of life (14 July 2020, vatican.va)
4. Ibid.



Archdiocese
of Toronto

Palliative Care and a Catholic Response to Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

“All who experience the uncertainties so often brought about by sickness and death need the witness of hope provided by those who care for them and who remain at their side. Palliative care, while seeking to alleviate the burden of pain as much as possible, is above all a concrete sign of closeness and solidarity with our brothers and sisters who are suffering.”

Pope Francis to the participants in the Symposium "Towards a Narrative of Hope: An International Interfaith Symposium on Palliative Care" Toronto, 21-23 May 2024



Why Palliative Care?

- Palliative care affirms the intrinsic value of every life, given to us by God. It neither seeks to hasten nor postpone death.
- It manages pain, helping individuals navigate their symptoms while in treatment or helps alleviate physical pain until natural death.
- It recognises the integrity and sacredness of the whole person—their physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and religious needs. The team approach in palliative care includes coordinating clinical care expertise and practical supports between professionals, families, volunteers and the wider community. A single medical practitioner cannot fulfil all these roles.
- It allows people to work through their emotions in a supportive environment. Negative emotions (fear, anxiety, loneliness, powerlessness, etc.) need not mark one's final days. The Church wants people to die with dignity and in peace.
- Loneliness is often a factor for people who are considering euthanasia or assisted suicide. Palliative care allows people to reconnect with the larger community and not spend their final days in isolation, loneliness, pain and suffering.
- It is a spiritually beneficial way forward. Through engaging in the process of dying, the sacrament of Anointing of the Sick and prayer, individuals and families come to a place of closeness to Jesus, acceptance and spiritual healing. Profound moments of reconciliation between family members, and God are commonplace.

Why not

Medical Assistance in Dying (MAID)?

Euthanasia and assisted suicide, often referred to as “Medical Assistance in Dying” or “MAID” for short, presents a false alternative that suggests ordinary care owed to a person can be legitimately stopped.

It cannot.

- Catholics believe that with death, life is changed, not ended. All life is a gift from God and is sacred. Killing is never the answer. The Church teaches that “Intentional euthanasia, whatever its forms or motives, is murder. It is gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, his Creator.” In addition, “suicide is seriously contrary to justice, hope, and charity. It is forbidden by the fifth commandment.”¹
- Pope Francis refers to it as “a failure of love, a reflection of a ‘throwaway culture’ in which persons are no longer seen as a paramount value to be cared for and respected.”²
- Human compassion consists not in causing death, but, as Jesus showed us, in embracing the ill, accompanying them in their difficulties, offering them affection, attention, and the means to alleviate the suffering.³

- The dying person is given special grace from God, calling them to conversion, trust and eternal life, most especially through the Sacrament of the Sick.
- The request for death is often an anguished plea for love and help, an expression of helplessness and hopelessness, and a futile attempt to help loved ones move on with their lives. Euthanasia and assisted suicide exploit these feelings in a way that is not helpful for individuals or families.
- MAID hinders the natural process whereby, instead of embracing the dying experience by placing our hope and trust in Christ’s victory over death as well as accepting our human condition, euthanasia and assisted suicide “short-circuit” this, leaving family and friends to pick up the pieces.
- When killing is seen as the “right thing to do,” the “compassionate way forward,” or “the logical thing” in a society, the value it places on life itself is diminished. One must ask what is of more value than life? Money, lifestyle, expedient use of resources? Not so.
- Euthanasia and assisted suicide contradict the fundamental principles of medical care. “Every individual who cares for the sick (physician, nurse, relative, volunteer, pastor) has the moral responsibility to ...adhere to the highest standards of self-respect and respect for others by embracing, safeguarding and promoting human life until natural death.”⁴



Though persons who are dying may feel as if they are not productive, their life has no meaning and they are a burden to their family and society, **MAID is not the answer:** *Love, Faith and Compassionate Care* reassure us of our inherent worth and dignity.