

The Catholic Women's League of Canada **Position Paper on** **Euthanasia and Living Wills**

The Catholic Women's League of Canada, representing 130,000 members from all provinces and territories in Canada, is opposed to any form of euthanasia for any reason. The use of living wills, which is a form of voluntary euthanasia, used as a personal determinate to end one's own life is in direct opposition to our view that only God, the Creator and author of all life, can determine the span of each life.

The Vatican II document, *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World* condemns all offences against human life and states, "For God, the Lord of Life, has conferred on men the surpassing ministry of safeguarding life – a ministry which must be fulfilled in a manner which is worthy of man."

Successive statements on our appreciation of the sanctity of life have been presented and accepted by our membership throughout the years. One of the many aspects of life which we have considered has been that of the preservation of life at conception, and some resolutions dealing with this were:

- 1974 Genetic Engineering
- 1975 Against Abortion and Supporting Abortion Counselling
- 1975 Natural Family Planning Groups
- 1979 Natural Family Planning Groups
- 1982 Fetal Alcohol Syndrome
- 1982 Sanctity of Life
- 1983 Surrogate Motherhood
- 1984 In-Vitro Fertilization

We actively oppose those elements in our society which detract from the dignity of life and from the respect which we are obligated to accord to all life.

Our 1975 resolution on euthanasia stated:

Whereas, The laws of God and the teachings of the church have always emphasized the sacredness of life, from conception to natural death, and stands firm in its objection to mercy killing and euthanasia,

Whereas, The Catholic Women's League of Canada seeks to uphold the laws established by God and His church; therefore, be it

Resolved, That all councils seriously undertake the study of death and dying, learning to differentiate between extraordinary life supports which prolong life by artificial means as opposed to ordinary life preserving care.

Our 1979 Statement on Human Rights continues the quote previously mentioned from the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*: "Whatever is opposed to life itself, such as any type of murder, genocide, abortion, euthanasia, or willful self-destruction, whatever violates the human person...poisons human society, but they do more harm to those who practice them than

those who suffer from the injury. Moreover, they are a supreme dishonour to the Creator.”

In 1980, the Sacred Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith issued their *Declaration on Euthanasia* which stated, “By euthanasia is understood an action or omission which of itself or by intention causes death, in order that all suffering may in this way be eliminated.”

We also recognize the *Declaration on Euthanasia*’s statement defining the ethical difference in using ordinary means and extraordinary means in the treatment of the terminally ill. “One is never obliged to use extraordinary means.”

Living Will: A living will is a written directive of an adult person authorizing the withholding or withdrawal of extraordinary life-sustaining procedures in the situation of terminal illness. The desire to write a living will is usually because of the fear of suffering, loss of dignity, or of becoming a burden to family or society. A living will has the potential of prohibiting a doctor from exercising his/her best medical judgment, the creation of ethical dilemmas or could also be a source of abuse. Although legal in some countries, the Law Reform Commission of Canada in 1982 rejected living wills as unnecessary. Presently living wills are not legally binding on Canadian physicians.

The Catholic Women’s League of Canada holds membership in the Canadian Catholic Health Care Association (CHAC) and gives support to hospices and palliative care units wherever they are in existence. CHAC “...promotes respect for the inherent dignity of each person and reveres that unique experience of life, of sickness and of death.” and “...helps to develop structures which fosters holistic health, respect, and reverence for those who are sick, aged, disabled and dying.”

As CWL members and sharers in a common humanity, it is our apostolic duty to assist and promote the preservation and dignity of the gift of life in all its aspects. We respect dignity of life at the beginning of life (conception), at the time of death and all stages in between.

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