

LEARN: Week 3 Handout

Caring for Our Elders — End-of-Life Issues & Accompanying the Elderly, Sick, and Dying

As Catholics, we are called to accompany the elderly, the sick, and the dying with love and respect. In a culture that often measures worth by productivity and independence, the Church proclaims that every human life—especially in moments of weakness—is a sacred gift, deserving of care, dignity, and compassion.”

Core Themes:

1. **Every life is sacred until its natural end.** “Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect” (CCC 2276).
2. **Euthanasia and assisted suicide are never morally acceptable.** Directly intending death to eliminate suffering is always wrong (CCC 2277).
3. **Refusing over-zealous treatment is not euthanasia.** Extraordinary or disproportionate medical measures may be forgone when death is imminent, but basic care and pain management must remain (CCC 2278–79).

“True compassion leads to sharing another’s pain; it does not kill the person whose suffering we cannot bear.”

— St. John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae* 66

4. **Palliative care is an act of charity.** It accompanies the dying with dignity and hope (CCC 2279).
5. **The elderly are a gift, not a burden.** Their wisdom strengthens families and communities (Ps 92:15; *Compendium* 222).
6. **Hope transforms suffering.** Pope Benedict XVI: “It is not by sidestepping or fleeing from suffering that we are healed, but by our capacity for accepting it, maturing through it and finding meaning through union with Christ” (*Spe Salvi* 37).
7. **Resist the throwaway culture.** Pope Francis warns against discarding those considered “no longer needed” (*Fratelli Tutti* 18).

Other Important Teachings:

- **Honoring Father and Mother:** Scripture reminds us to care for parents and elders as a sacred duty (cf. Ex 20:12; *Amoris Laetitia* 191).
- **The Elderly as Witnesses:** Older persons carry memory, wisdom, and faith that bind generations together and enrich the whole Church (*Compendium* 222; *Evangelii Gaudium* 108).

What Can I Do?

- **Pray** for those nearing death, that they may be surrounded by love, peace, and faith. Remember caregivers, nurses, doctors, and family members who accompany the suffering.
- **Learn:** read *Evangelium Vitae* (John Paul II) on euthanasia and the value of life in weakness. Reflect on *Spe Salvi* (Benedict XVI) and *Fratelli Tutti* (Francis) on suffering, hope, and solidarity.
- **Support** ministries that provide hospice and palliative care. Reach out to those who may feel forgotten or abandoned.
- **Advocate:** promote laws and policies that protect the dignity of the sick and elderly.
- **Serve:** visit the elderly in nursing homes or parish communities.

Take-Home Message:

To respect life at its end is to affirm that no one is disposable and no suffering is meaningless in Christ. May we be people who resist the throwaway culture by walking with our elders and the sick.

Reflection Question:

How does our treatment of the sick and elderly reveal whether we live in a culture of life or a culture of disposal?

Church Teachings to Consult (*if you want to learn more*):

- [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) (nos. 2276–2279)
- [*Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*](#) (2004; nos. 5, 148, 155, 222, 285)
- John Paul II, [*Evangelium Vitae*](#) (1995; nos. 15, 64–67, 73, 89, 94)
- Benedict XVI, [*Spe Salvi*](#) (2007; nos. 25, 35–40), [*Caritas in Veritate*](#) (2009; nos. 28, 75–76)
- Francis, [*Fratelli Tutti*](#) (2020; nos. 18–21, 35, 98), [*Amoris Laetitia*](#) (2016; nos. 48, 83, 128, 191), [*Laudato Si*](#) (2015; nos. 122–123)