

*Statement of Cardinal Joseph W. Tobin, C.Ss.R., on
New Jersey's Assisted Suicide Law
August 1, 2019*

Human compassion fills our hearts with sadness when we hear about an individual who wishes to end his or her life to escape the pain and suffering of illness, disability, or disease. The fear associated with such devastating human conditions is real and legitimate.

However, as Pope Francis has noted, we must be careful not to yield to a false sense of compassion. Our Holy Father reminds us that we must never take a human life—even, or especially, our own, since “this is a sin against God, the creator.”

The gift of human life and dignity is sacred and must be respected and protected at every stage, from conception to natural death. Respect for human life encourages a trust and peace with God despite illness and suffering.

We remain united to Christ through our suffering. St. Paul reminds us that nothing can separate us from the love of God. We have Christ in life and death – when he will intercede for us and bring us to eternal joy.

We must be clear. What legislatures now refer to as “death with dignity” is legal permission for one to end their own life with a lethal overdose of prescription drugs. This new state law has become an answer to addressing one's fear of affliction or suffering. What is more, in a for-profit industry like health care, there is the real danger that euthanasia will be seen as a cost-cutting measure. There is evidence in states that have already legalized assisted suicide that insurers encourage this “solution” instead of more costly medical care. The handicapped and impaired will feel pressure to end their lives.

This law also puts immense pressure on Catholics in health care ministries to follow their conscience instead of being coerced into providing assistance that is immoral.

Dying patients who request euthanasia should receive loving care, psychological and spiritual support, and appropriate remedies for pain and other symptoms so they can *live* with dignity until the time of natural death.

Many families surround loved ones with comfort in their final moments of life. The Little Sisters of the Poor provides a powerful witness to the conviction that loving, prayerful, and attentive presence offered in times of suffering and death can be redemptive. Their mission, which brings strength, peace, and assurance to those under their care, quietly proclaims their belief that “dying with dignity” comes with humble acceptance, not through the avoidance of suffering.

We only have to consider the cross of Christ to be reminded that God, in the hour of His greatest suffering, expressed His deepest compassion for us, and chose not to avoid painful torment and humiliation, but to accept it for our sake. ♦