

Position Statement on

Euthanasia, Assisted Suicide and Care at the End of Life

Human life is a sacred gift from God. Dignity is neither conferred nor withheld by human choice; it is inherent in each person. As individuals and communities we are called to respect the sacred value of human life and at all times to show each other care.

It can be a challenge to know how to do this for a person who is suffering profoundly or living with disease that is incurable and progressing. We know that death cannot be eliminated. Even with the most advanced medical science and attentive caregiving, cure is not always possible, and pain and suffering cannot always be overcome. Never, however, must we judge that a person's life is not worth living or use anyone's suffering as a justification for causing their death.

The Salvation Army believes that euthanasia and assisted suicide are morally wrong, and holds that they should continue to be illegal under Canadian law.

Euthanasia, which involves the direct and intentional ending of another person's life as a means of relieving their suffering, undermines human dignity, as does assisting another person's suicide.

The Salvation Army believes that respect for the dignity of human life demands quality care for all persons at the end of their lives. We, therefore, promote access to palliative care that provides holistic care (physical, emotional, psychological, social and spiritual care) when cure is no longer medically possible. We also believe care extends beyond the individual. Human beings exist in social relationships; what happens to one person has a deep impact on others too. The complex needs and the suffering of the family, direct care providers and the social community of concern also deserve support.

Decisions about medical treatment should focus on the benefits and burdens to be experienced by the patient, and should not be intended to hasten death or delay it. As far as possible, decision-making around end-of-life concerns should remain in the hands of the dying person in collaboration with competent health care professionals, assisted by loved ones whom the patient wants to be involved. If the dying person is no longer capable of being involved in decision-making, others who know him or her well should be empowered to act as substitute decision-makers. Good management of pain and other symptoms is not euthanasia; and it is not euthanasia to withdraw, withhold or forgo treatment that would only prolong the dying process.

Because human life is a divine gift, Christians seek to treasure it. Because human history shows how readily the life of others can be devalued, Christians fight vigorously to protect the vulnerable. But because human beings have an eternal destiny, Christians say that death is not to be denied or resisted at all costs. As the imminence of death becomes more evident, it is important to communicate to dying persons that they are worthy of respect, that they are loved and that they will not be abandoned.



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