

**POPE FRANCIS ON
END OF LIFE ISSUES:**



Grant us the grace to appreciate the value of spending time with those who, thanks to our closeness and affection, feel more loved and comforted. How great a lie lurks behind certain phrases which so insist on the importance of "quality of life" that they make people think that lives affected by grave illness are not worth living!



**The Bishops' Conference
of Scotland**

**General Secretariat
64 Aitken Street
Airdrie
ML6 6LY**

**Email: gensec@bcos.org.uk
Website: www.bcos.org.uk**

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*The Bishops' Conference
of Scotland*

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**End of life issues -
A simple guide to Catholic
teaching**



Difficult Decisions

Kathleen, a much loved grandmother, collapsed at home one Saturday morning and was rushed to hospital. Early signs pointed to a stroke. The doctors talked about the next 24 hours being critical; Kathleen might not survive. The priest was called and Kathleen received the anointing of the sick. Doctors talked about brain damage. Suddenly the family was faced with big questions. What would Kathleen have wanted? Could the Church help guide any decisions? How do we accept death when it comes and cherish life while we can?

There have been remarkable medical and technological advances so that the chronically ill can receive life saving treatments. We can be truly thankful for such advances. Yet we will all die. These advances have led to more complex decision making about appropriate treatment. At the end of life, there are two temptations to avoid: one is trying to keep someone alive at all costs, even when it is clear that death is imminent and treatment is having no effect or harming the patient; the other is to withdraw or withhold medical treatment at the end of life on the basis that this life is no longer worth living.

We need to prepare to face life threatening crises, ideally talking with others – spouse, siblings, sons and daughters. The family should be the privileged place where mutual support and understanding occurs.

Principles from Catholic teaching

Respect for the life of every person

Respecting life means every person must be valued for as long as they live. Every life is a precious gift never to be destroyed or neglected. It is wrong to hasten or bring about death. God will call us in his good time.

Life need not be preserved at all costs

Due respect for life is compatible with the judgment, 'this medical treatment is no longer worthwhile', either because it no longer serves its purpose (is futile), or because it is very burdensome, dangerous, or disproportionate to the expected outcome: there is no need to accept 'over-zealous' treatment, traditionally called 'extraordinary' by the Church.

Making a medically informed decision

Before deciding the right thing to do, I need to know what is wrong with me, or my loved one, what is likely to happen and the benefits and risks of different treatments. It is important to listen to the doctors but also to ask questions.

I need to make sure that no one is making assumptions about what I would want. If I am not sure about this I can ask for a second opinion by a different doctor.

The burdens of treatment are relative to the person

Judgments about what counts as excessively burdensome are relative to my sensitivities, physical condition and situation. The decisions should be made by me if I am competent or, if not, by those legally entitled to act for me. Doctors should always respect my reasonable decisions.



Caring and accepting care

I may not be conscious or I may be confused when decisions need to be made about my care. It is important not to give into the temptation that others would be better off without us. We should allow them to show their love and care for us.

Food and water are basic needs

Some forms of treatment or care are more basic than others. In particular the giving and accepting of food and drink, by tube if necessary, is part of ordinary care for ourselves and hospitality to others. We should not be denied food or drink except when they are no longer effective in sustaining life.

Acceptance of death is part of Christian hope in the resurrection from the dead

For the Christian, the moment of death is the time when God comes to take us home. If we die accepting God's mercy then we can look forward to the resurrection, reunion with those who have gone before, and unimaginable joy.

Prayer for a good death

O blessed Joseph, who breathed your last in the arms of Jesus and Mary, obtain for me this grace: that I may breathe forth my soul in praise, saying in spirit, if I am unable to do so in words: "Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul."