



Diocese of Worcester
Office of the Bishop
49 Elm Street
Worcester, Massachusetts 01609

November 4, 2012

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Next Tuesday is Election Day when the citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts will be asked to vote on a referendum item, Ballot Question 2, the so-called "Death With Dignity Act". This proposed piece of legislation is poorly written, deliberately confusing and morally flawed.

Among the most critical moral flaws in this legislation is that Question 2 does not require a patient to consult with a psychiatrist before receiving a doctor's prescription to commit suicide. Mental health care experts tell us that many terminally ill patients, maybe as many as 50%, suffer from depression. Yet the proposed law does not require a psychological evaluation.

Although the Ballot Question 2 promotes "physician assisted suicide", the physician's role in the patient's suicide ends when the physician writes the lethal prescription of 100 pills of the deadly drug, Seconal, which are ingested alone, without any attending doctor. Moreover, no member of the patient's family or loved one needs to be present since the law does not require the patient to notify anyone of his or her decision to commit suicide. Dying alone and unattended, especially if there should be unforeseen side effects from the lethal drug, can hardly be described as "dying with dignity".

Before a patient can receive a prescription to commit suicide, he or she must be diagnosed by two physicians that he or she is terminally ill and has six months or less to live. However, doctors readily acknowledge that terminal diagnoses can often be inaccurate with patients often living months or years longer. Finally, what is very troubling is that the death certificate must list the cause of death as the underlying disease and not assisted suicide. This is simply not true.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, every person, no matter how gravely ill, still enjoys a God-given human dignity that must be preserved and protected until his or her natural death. Ballot Question 2 does not promote human dignity but radically undermines it. As Catholics, we should be in the forefront in working for a just and humane society where the right to life is inviolable. A vote for physician assisted suicide is a moral failure to promote the compassionate care we owe to the terminally ill. As disciples of Jesus Christ, the Divine Physician, we are called to comfort the sick and not help them end their lives.

During this Year of Faith, all members of the Church are being called to bear public witness to their faith, particularly their faith in the Gospel of Life. A vote to defeat Ballot Question 2 is a very significant way of giving such a life-affirming witness. May God grant us the wisdom and courage to build a culture of life and love where the precious gift of life is protected from conception to natural death.

With every prayerful best wish, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ *Robert J. McManus*
Most Reverend Robert J. McManus
Bishop of Worcester