

God makes us citizens of this earth so that we may become citizens of heaven. The passage from one world to the other is the journey that we set out on in this life. Some of us may lose full capacity to direct our final steps. Taking the time now to map your expectations for that last stage of the journey will allow for your loved ones and your medical professionals to guide you through that final, sacred time in the best way possible.

How we die may well have bearing on how we live in the next life. Following the right guideposts on that final stretch of road will allow us to let that journey be brought to the proper conclusion that God has envisioned for all time.

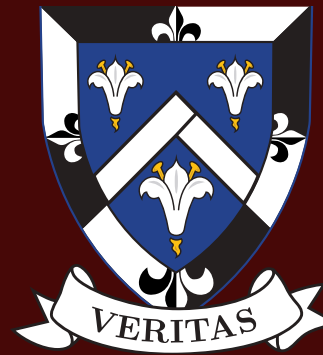
#### SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Healthcare Services, 5th ed., 2009**, available at [uscbb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/upload/Ethical-Religious-Directives-Catholic-Health-Care-Services-fifth-edition-2009.pdf](http://uscbb.org/issues-and-action/human-life-and-dignity/health-care/upload/Ethical-Religious-Directives-Catholic-Health-Care-Services-fifth-edition-2009.pdf).
- **Now and at the Hour of our Death: Catholic Guidance for End-of- Life Decision Making**, available at [catholicendoflife.org/](http://catholicendoflife.org/) (includes state-specific resources).
- **The End-of-Life Guide** produced by the National Catholic Bioethics Center, available at [nbccenter.org/publications/end-life-guide/](http://nbccenter.org/publications/end-life-guide/).

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# JOURNEYING FROM THIS WORLD TO THE NEXT

PREPARATIONS FOR THE FINAL STAGE OF THE TRIP



*“The true task of medicine is to cure if possible, always to care.” –St. John Paul II*

### PREPARING FOR A JOURNEY

When you go on a long trip, it usually makes sense to plan ahead and make sure you have the items you will need for your travel. Often there are some documents you will want to take with you. If you’re leaving the country, you’ll need your passport. You’ll also probably want to have a credit card or traveler’s checks, your plane tickets, your hotel reservations, a list of allergies, emergency contact information, travel guides, and travel insurance. Life itself is often compared to a journey, one from this world to the next. Like the more significant trips we take during our life, we can better prepare for our eventual passing from this life to the next by making certain arrangements in advance. Included among these preparations is the task of making sure that we have certain documents that pertain to our care.

### DIRECTIONS FOR DECISION-MAKING

Toward the end of your journey in this life, it is not unlikely that certain decisions will need to be made concerning your medical care. For some of us, we may be unable to communicate our desires and expectations during this stage of our life. This is why it is important to have in place a written *Advanced Medical Directive* and *Durable Health Care Power of Attorney*. These documents take different forms and are often combined, but in any event, usually include the following features:

- a statement describing in general terms the treatment you would like to receive while under certain medical states or conditions, as well as your preferences concerning experimental procedures and organ donation.
- The identification of a trusted and responsible individual to act as your healthcare proxy if you are unable to make or communicate health care decisions on your own. The healthcare proxy is

sometimes called a “surrogate” or “healthcare agent.” The durable health care power of attorney empowers your chosen proxy to make health care decisions on your behalf, subject to any limitation you place on your proxy’s authority.

Proper drafting of your Advance Medical Directive and Durable Health Care Power of Attorney can help ensure that you will receive treatment and care in accordance with Church teachings. For example, a document that incorporates Catholic ideals will normally include an expression of your desire to receive proper spiritual care (i.e., receipt of the sacraments, visit from a priest) in the event that you are in danger of death and cannot communicate your requests. Proper preparation of these documents will also direct your medical professionals to provide ordinary and proportionate care, while at the same time give you or your healthcare proxy the ability to avoid, subject to the Church’s guidance, the extraordinary and disproportionate or unreasonably burdensome treatments that you would not wish to pursue. The bishops’ conferences of several states, as well as other Catholic groups such as the National Catholic Bioethics Center, offer examples of documents for your use.

The choice of a responsible and trusted individual as healthcare proxy is perhaps the most important of end-of- life medical decisions. While an Advance Medical Directive allows you to specify your preferences, the benefits and burdens of various procedures depend on circumstances that cannot always be anticipated. It is best to have in place a document that leaves some flexibility for your proxy to interpret your wishes and make the informed decisions you would make if you were able.

Your proxy should be someone who understands and shares your concerns and will abide by Catholic principles and your preferences. Having at least one substitute individual named in the document as a “secondary” or “successor”



agent is also wise in the event your initial selection is unable to act.

It’s important to recognize that if you do not specify a trusted healthcare proxy and you become incapacitated, someone other than you will still have to make health care decisions on your behalf. Naming a healthcare proxy gives you the ability to identify just who you wish that person to be.

### SOME PITFALLS TO AVOID

In preparing the documents you put in place to guide end-of- life decision-making, there are a few pitfalls you want to avoid. Two in particular are addressed below:

- **Living wills.** One thing you want to be careful of is any blanket refusal of some or all kinds of treatment. This is the flaw of many documents called *living wills*. The problem is that these sorts of documents tend to eliminate options without allowing for a full consideration of the circumstances relevant to a particular medical condition. In other words, a living will may prevent you from receiving proportionate, ordinary interventions that would benefit you or even restore you to health. A better approach allows an appropriate amount of flexibility for your healthcare proxy to apply your wishes in light of all particular circumstances in the moment.
- **MOLST or POLST.** There are other instruments that share the flaws of living wills in attempting to make decisions about life-sustaining treatment without consideration of the risks and benefits of a particular case. These include *Medical Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment* (MOLST) or *Provider Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment* (POLST). MOLSTs or POLSTs are particularly dangerous for two reasons. First, these directives, although they are not permitted to be issued without your consent, constitute a physician’s orders and generally do not require your signature to take effect. Second, physician orders of this kind will generally be obeyed immediately by EMTs, nurses, and other health care staff when events trigger their application. If medical professionals apply those orders in a way that violates Catholic principles or your wishes, your agent may not be able to stop or correct their actions. If you have your physician issue a MOLST or POLST, you need to take great care to ensure that it will not terminate or prevent ordinary care, or interfere with your agent’s duties to carry out your wishes.