



March 16, 2022

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Dear Parishioners of the Archdiocese,

The way our society views matters of life and death has changed rapidly over the years, often in ways that emphasize personal autonomy over the Church's teaching that the end of our life's journey is in God's hands not our own. Euthanasia and physician-assisted death, euphemistically named 'MAID', are presented as compassionate, pain-free and controlled 'exits' from the world, leading many people to welcome these procedures. Yet Catholics know that a matter as important as dying demands a deeper response than demanding death 'on our own terms,' as it is sometimes expressed. Rather, in God's Providence, we are called to God as we approach the 'House of the Father.'

Our Church, with all its resources, is ready and willing to help us discern the best approach the issues relating to the end of life, and I wish to share with you good news about a program that aims to do just that. *Horizon for Hope: A Toolkit for Parishes on Palliative Care*, is written under the aegis of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, with an emphasis on a 'good death,' palliative care and 'living life to the end' in as positive way as possible. This four-part program will help us in: 'Understanding the Experience of Death and Dying,' 'Discerning and Decision-making at the End-of-Life,' 'Accompanying at the End-of-Life,' and 'Supporting and Integrating inside the Larger Community.' You can learn more here: <https://bit.ly/HorizonForHope>.

Many of us will have questions about palliative care, starting or stopping treatment, Catholic teaching on euthanasia, palliative care and so on. This program aims to provide spiritual and practical material to assist in our end-of-life discernment, including how to access support and resources in our community. It does so through discussions led by a facilitator, as well as participation in small and large group sessions, use of videos, questions for private reflection and multiple suggestions for growth in understanding the issues relating to the end of life.

The underlying hope is that, while the program is thought-provoking and useful for us as individuals, it will go beyond that, inspiring us to initiate some parish action, sharing what we have learned in a concrete way. Upon completion of the program, participants might discern a call, for example, to form a committee to visit residents at a local hospice or long-term care home or to find ways to be more inclusive of sick and shut-in parishioners. The outcomes are limitless, and each parish will discern its own path.

I pray that our parishes will respond whole-heartedly to this call to engagement, to accompany those who need support and compassion so that death and dying are not seen as a period of loneliness, abandonment or feeling forgotten. In his 'Letter to the Elderly,' St Pope John Paul II invites us to be not afraid, but to 'Live life to the end!' This is a powerful and positive note on which to approach death and dying, and honours the God who brought us into the world and who eventually calls us from it.

May each one of us reflect on a Catholic approach to death and dying, drawing on the resources noted as we support one another and the dignity of every human life from the moment of conception to natural death.

Yours in Christ,

+ Thomas Card. Collins
Thomas Cardinal Collins

St Pope John Paul II. Letter of His Holiness John Paul II to the Elderly. Vatican City, 1999.
Letter to the Elderly (October 1, 1999) | John Paul II (vatican.va)