

REFLECTIONS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

Some practical and pastoral reflection for pastoral carers, chaplains and healthcare professionals witnessing and accompanying in this way could include considering:

- How might I come to identify in myself any tensions in my care of this patient?
- Do I have a space (e.g. a support network, trusted friend, priest or other professional colleague) where I can discuss my reactions to my pastoral work and ministry in a free and open way?
- In the case of conflicting views, am I still able to deliver ethical pastoral care to this person that fulfils my obligation to outline the ethical problem with euthanasia? What might be stopping me from doing this and who can I discuss this with in a way that enables me to be listened to?
- Am I giving myself appropriate space and support to ensure my own wellbeing in the call to commit to be present and professional in my work/ministry? Am I receiving regular supervision or professional pastoral accompaniment relevant to the demands of my ministry?
- Do I have a pastoral care support network myself (e.g. spiritual direction, mentoring, pastoral counselling, support from a

trusted friend, brother priest or member of a faith community)?

- Am I engaged with intentional and professionally accompanied reflective practice in ministry? (e.g. group supervision in the context of clinical pastoral care, the regular writing of verbatim/theological reflections?)
- Am I able to make time to be sustained in my work and commitment through prayer and meditation on God's word?
- Do I have any questions that I need to ask of those with whom I am professionally accountable to? Do I feel free that I can have an open conversation with my superiors about my commitment to witness and accompany?

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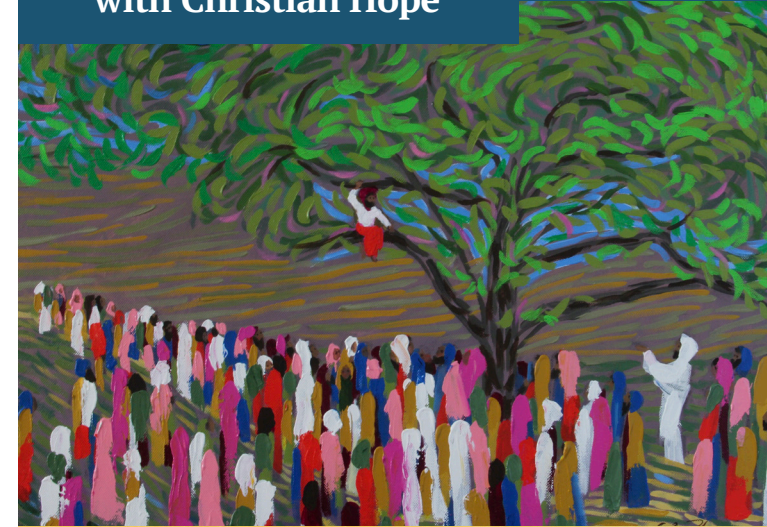


COVER ART
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To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope”



"Zacchaeus" by Irene Thomas

“Christian accompaniment is a continuation of the ministry of Jesus Christ, who reached out to the sick, the outcast and the sinner. He never condoned evil. He did not condemn the wayward, but he always called them to conversion.”

REFLECTIONS FOR HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

To witness and accompany a sick or dying person with Christian hope is an extension of Christ's own witness and ministry.

Jesus reached out to all in a spirit of hope.

There are four elements to accompanying a dying person:

- A **COMMITMENT** to be the patient's companion during the last phase of their life;
- An **UNDERSTANDING** of the medical care that will assist the patient at this time;
- An **UNDERSTANDING** and **ACCEPTANCE** of the Church's teaching about the sacred and intrinsic value of every human life;
- A **READINESS** to provide appropriate forms of pastoral care toward the end of life.

As a healthcare professional, it is important to explain to patients and families that euthanasia does not provide effective health care, but rather takes the life of the patient and eliminates the possibility of further medical care.

Primary care physicians, such as doctors, who provide access to lethal medication are directly cooperating in the act of euthanasia, which is contrary to their call to care for patients rather than to harm.

All healthcare professionals are obliged to outline the palliative and end-of life care that is available.

FIVE COMMON PRINCIPLES

There are five common principles underpinning our response to someone considering euthanasia:

1

Because of our Christian vision of the human person, we can never accept euthanasia as a morally acceptable option. Healthcare professionals have the responsibility to acknowledge the fundamental dignity of the human person.

2

Humans struggle in the face of suffering and illness and this can give rise to feelings of helplessness and isolation, even to the point where purpose and meaning in life is questioned. The Christian response to suffering involves faith: having hope that we are never alone, and that, in fact our deepest moments of suffering are our closest and most profound experiences of the suffering Christ and the mystery of the Cross. Suffering has the ability in the light of faith to transform us and can be a gift of love that is deeply grounded in human reality.

3

At the core of every person's heart is a desire (acknowledged or not) to be touched by the comfort, consolation and love of God. To accompany a person is to remind them of God's presence with them, and of the mysterious longing for peace and relationship with God.

The healthcare professional requires a deeply listening heart. But this can take time, and patience is needed. It involves a commitment to walk with a patient and their family on a journey without necessarily knowing how that journey will unfold.

4

The Church embraces the best of science and medical care in order to relieve the suffering of the sick or dying person. When this is exhausted through inefficacy or unreasonable side-effects the time will come when death should be allowed to arrive naturally. This principle also notes that the Church continues to advocate for effective palliative care, given that, administered thoughtfully, it supports the Christian vision of the human person.

5

It is important to have the appropriate space and support to ensure your own wellbeing in your work. This could involve regular supervision or a support network.