

Assisted death: Troubling issue requires thought



REV. DAVID STRONG

MORAL PERSPECTIVES

The same week that I read about the case of Dr. Jack Kevorkian, I noted a small article in The New York Times. It told of a charge of murder brought against a physician in the death of a baby which weighed less than two pounds at birth.

The physician, a woman and a neonatal specialist, was charged with pressing the carotid artery to cut off blood to the brain. The premature infant was kidney damaged and had been removed from a ventilator.

How do we respond to this newly-raised issue of euthanasia? At times, euthanasia can be planned neglect, or even the removal of a life-sustaining machine.

I read through the strong anti-euthanasia statement which was printed in a full-page ad by the Archdiocese of Detroit. It is helpful to read through such a strong and thoughtful statement to test our own beliefs. I found places where I agreed strongly with the Catholic Church's statement. There were other places where I strongly disagree.

There must be exceptions to every rule. There must be a way to protect us from medical technology. I remember that every time I accompanied my father to the hospital following a terrible automobile accident, I was afraid. I was afraid that the hospital would plug him into a machine and both he and we would lose our choice.

As a clergyman, I have seen and heard of such cases. Once a person is plugged into a life-sustaining machine, it is in some cases impossible to remove this equipment. I have witnessed persons who had long histories of organ failure ask the hospital do everything to keep them alive.

The person I remember in particular was a woman in her mid-80s who was afraid to die. She died after tens of thousands of dollars and the talents of physicians and nurses were spent on her, without purpose. She died after a long time in a coma.

The issue of assisted or allowed death is similar to abortion. It is a troubling issue that requires much thought and one where there will never be agreement in the religious community, much less in society. Legal experts suggest that it will take at least five years to settle the issue in our law.

The Social Creed of my denomination has determined a position with regard to "Death with Dignity." For me, who has walked through this issue with my father, the key phrases are: "We recognize the agonizing personal and moral decisions faced by the dying, their physicians, their families and their friends. Therefore, we assert the right of every person to die with dignity, with loving personal care and without efforts to prolong terminal illnesses merely because the technology is

available to do so."

The main thing that I object to within the position stated by the Archdiocese of Detroit is the rigid rule and set moral theory which they state. These issues regarding anyone with terminal illnesses are agonizing. They are financially draining. They often come to a point where there is no freedom and no quality of life.

As with abortion, we have no

answers to assisted death. Yes, society must be very careful. Yet, we do not live in a time in which love, mercy and freedom will be denied.

It is ironic that we also live in a time when there is an increasing cry for the state to execute criminals. Many of the same people would deny choice to a terminally ill person to end his or her own life. We want to kill criminals but

not let a sick person end his or her own life. Assisted death is an important issue which we must follow closely in the months and years to come.

The Rev. David Strong is pastor of Central United Methodist Church in Detroit. If you have a question or a comment, call him at 933-2047, mailbox number 1878, on a Touch-Tone phone.

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Haven hosts fund-raising fashion show

Oakland County's shelter and counseling center for domestic violence, Haven, will host the sixth annual Promenade of Hope fund-raiser fashion show on Monday, Dec. 13.

Celebrity models include Joe Dumars, Winnie Johnson and Don Chaney. Admission is \$150 for friends, \$300 for patrons and \$500 for benefactors. Call Cathy at 788-0482 for reservations.

40 join history honor society

Forty students and faculty in the Oakland University Department of History were inducted Nov. 12 into Phi Alpha Theta, the International Honor Society in History.

The induction marked the establishment of an OU chapter of Phi Alpha Theta to promote the study and enjoyment of history at Oakland University.

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