

BELIEFS Values

Don't trivialize physician-assisted suicide



REV. RONALD BYARS

In suicide a legitimate way of taking control when it seems that life has lost its meaning. According to polls, a majority of people in Michigan support so-called "physician-assisted" suicide. In this space last month, I explored some of the reasons why I think there is so much support for it, and suggested some reasons why physician-assisted suicide may not be as simple a remedy for suffering as it seems. A few years ago in another city, I used to visit an elderly woman in a nursing home. She was one of those extraordinary women whose beauty and grace seemed to increase as she aged. It was a delight to spend time with her. For some time, she had been experiencing a problem with the circulation in her legs. One day she confided that her doctor had told her that she would have to have a leg removed. If this were

not done, she would probably not survive. She had reached her late eighties, and although she still had a loving family and so very much attraction for her. She dreaded the surgery and the subsequent recovery period. Having thought about it previously, she had reached the conclusion that she would forego the surgery. Fully aware of the consequences, she was ready to give up her life. What should I have said to her? It seemed presumptuous to try to talk her into having surgery when she didn't want it. How could I assess whether life after surgery would be good enough to justify the ordeal? She was the one who had to live it - not I. My spur-of-the-moment reasoning was simply to offer my affirmation and support, whatever course she might choose. In fact, as I left the nursing home, I felt admiration for her courage and her wisdom. Certainly there is a time when it's time to let go of one's grip on life. My friend's daughters were fiercely attached to their mother and wanted to enjoy her for a while longer. They sensed, as I did not, that their mother was

suffering from depression. Less cautious than I, they talked her into having the surgery. The surgery went well, but the hospitalization was hard on the patient. At times, she was disoriented. When she came back to the nursing home, she was confined to a wheelchair. If I had argued her into having the surgery against her will, I would have been unwise. But then the unexpected happened. The patient fell in love. An elderly man from our church began to visit the woman. He came in the afternoons, driven by his daughter or a home-care worker. Always, he wore a suit and tie. They sat and talked quietly for hours. One day the two called their families together, telling them that they had an announcement to make. The families were a bit apprehensive. Did these two now in their nineties, intend to get married? The announcement was that they were "best friends." The friendship persisted and deepened until, at last, she died. I learned from this some obvious lessons. One is that even when it seems that a person has finished living her life, there may be some surprises in store. Of course, the situation might have turned out quite differently.

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COMMUNITY MESSENGER

Community Messenger features spiritual announcements from Oakland County religious institutions. Write: Community Messenger, Beliefs & Values Editor, Observer & Eccentric Newspapers, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham, MI 48009. Our fax number is (810) 644-1314.

■ PRIEST RETIRES
Father Donald Dacey, pastor of Our Lady Queen of Martyrs Parish since 1985, is retiring from active service as a parish priest. A farewell reception will be held from 1 to 3 p.m. on Sunday, June 23, at the parish's Lucian A. Herbert Social Hall, 32340 Picres, Beverly Hills. All those who know Dacey are invited to attend. Dacey completed his studies at Sacred Heart Seminary in Detroit and St. John Provincial Seminary in Plymouth. He has served the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Detroit in various capacities since his ordination in 1953.

■ BIBLE SCHOOL
A Vacation Bible School is scheduled for 9 a.m. to noon weekdays, June 24-28, at New Life Baptist Church, 1181 Harding, Rochester Hills. All children ages 4 through fifth grade are invited. The theme for this year is Camp Friendship. The focus of the week will be Jesus' adventures with his friends. It will take place in a camp setting. Along

with Bible stories and modern-day stories, there will be crafts and music classes as well as refreshments and recreation.

■ NEW SCHEDULE
First United Methodist Church, 1599 W. Maple Rd., Birmingham, began its summer schedule June 16. Worship services are held each Sunday at 8:30 and 10 a.m., with church school offered through grade 5 at 10 a.m. Coffee hour will be moved to the front lawn on at least four Sundays. The fall schedule resumes on Sunday, Sept. 8.

■ GOLF OUTING
KESHET, a Southfield-based organization for Jewish Families of Children with Special Needs, hosts its second annual golf outing at 11 a.m. on Thursday, June 27, at the Links of Novi Golf Course, Novi. The event includes 18 holes of golf with a golf cart, lunch, complementary beverages throughout the day, cocktails and dinner at 6:30 p.m. Tamaroff Buick of Southfield will display a new car on the green and award a free lease to the player who achieves a hole in one. There is a charge for the golf outing, which is tax deductible according to current tax law regulations. Non-golfers may attend the dinner only. Proceeds benefit KESHET's programs. For more information, call Don Rosenberg at (810) 258-9576 or (810) 647-4440.

■ LEARNING MINYAN
"Ask a Question, Any Question" is the theme for the next "Learning Minyan for Adults" at 10:30 a.m. Saturday, June 29, at Cong. B'nai Moshe, 6800 Drake Road, West Bloomfield. Leonard Wanetik, author of "Sedra Study for Everybody" will lead interested adults in a "Learning Minyan for Adults," featuring a free-wheeling discussion of the Jewish prayerbook and Sabbath service.

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