Opinion
Guest Voices



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The Illinois "End-of-Life Options Act" — signed into law by Gov. JB Pritzker in December — codifies physician-assisted suicide as a recognized medical option for terminally ill adult Illinois residents expected to die within six months, permitting them to obtain and self-administer a lethal prescription.

The act essentially makes assisted suicide a legislatively sanctioned health care practice. Unfortunately, once normalized, it inevitably reshapes moral and cultural attitudes toward the sick, elderly and dying because the law does more than regulate. Law forms conscience, shapes culture and teaches society what is morally acceptable. As St. John Paul II warned in *Evangelium Vitae*, a law that permits the direct killing of the innocent forfeits its claim to moral legitimacy.

Viewed through Catholic moral teaching and the lived reality of suffering, this bill is not an act of compassion but a cultural surrender. It shifts medicine from a vocation called to heal and comfort into an authority permitted to facilitate self-killing. Rather than elevating human dignity, it quietly erodes it.

As the church teaches, "Human compassion consists not in causing death, but in embracing the sick, in supporting them in their difficulties, in offering them affection, attention, and the means to alleviate the suffering."

There is a moment in *The Lord of the Rings* that illuminates our moral horizon with extraordinary clarity. The Hobbit Frodo, exhausted from bearing the weight of the Ring, collapses while climbing Mount Doom. He wants to give up. His desolation brings him to the point of being unable to remember joy, beauty or even the taste of strawberries. He feels swallowed by darkness and despair. Many suffering people speak that way in hospital rooms, hospice centers and nursing facilities: "I can't do this anymore." "I just want to die." "I am tired of being a burden." "I am tired of living."



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Sam does not scold or argue. He does something far more human. When Frodo can no longer carry the Ring, Sam says: "I can't carry it for you, but I can carry you."

This is no sentimental image. It reveals the true anthropology of compassion — what love looks like when suffering overwhelms strength. We are not called to eliminate those who suffer, but to sustain them. We are called to carry one another, to be Sam for the weary and Simon of Cyrene on the road to the Cross. This is the civilization of love.

Catholic faith does not say suffering is easy. It does not call the dying to heroic endurance without help. It insists on palliative care, psychological support, hospice, human tenderness and spiritual accompaniment. The church emphasizes: "Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted." When cure is no longer possible, care always is. Presence remains possible. Love remains possible. Communion remains possible.

Illinois' assisted suicide law claims to offer dignity but risks validating despair. It claims compassion but risks institutionalizing abandonment. It claims freedom but quietly invites cultural pressure upon the vulnerable.

A just and compassionate society should instead build structures that unambiguously tell the terminally ill, the elderly, the disabled and the suffering: *You are not a burden. You are not disposable. You still belong. We will not abandon you. We may not be able to cure you, but we will always care for you. And when you cannot walk, we will carry you.*

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Care is more than medical. It must be social, ecclesial and communal. One of the deepest drivers of requests for assisted suicide is not unmanaged pain but isolation: the fear of being alone, forgotten or a burden; the terror of dependence in a society that prizes autonomy; the anxiety of poverty, inadequate health care access and the absence of family or support networks. These are not failures of the individual. They are failures of community. A law that offers death while leaving loneliness, poverty and abandonment untouched offers not dignity, but an excuse for neglect.

The church, parishes and local communities are not called merely to raise a moral voice, but to act decisively — to help create the conditions in which the kingdom of God is truly near. Authentic compassion demands more than words — it requires rebuilding concrete structures of belonging so that the sick and the elderly never experience themselves as disposable.

This includes parish-based accompaniment teams for the homebound; transportation networks for medical appointments, Mass and daily needs; volunteers formed not simply to "check in," but to remain, listen and befriend; coordinated support for caregivers who are often exhausted and overwhelmed; and sustained advocacy for affordable health care and palliative access, so that no one is driven to despair by isolation or financial fear.

It also means resisting the temptation to outsource suffering exclusively to institutions. Nursing homes and care facilities can serve a role, but they must never replace relationship. A civilization that hides the elderly and the dying has already begun to forget its soul.

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The biblical measure of justice has never changed. Scripture consistently identifies the moral health of a society by how it treats the orphan, the widow and the stranger. These are the ones without power, without protection, without advocates.

In our age, the terminally ill person living alone, the disabled adult without family support, and the elderly patient navigating illness in urban anonymity have become the new widows and strangers. A society that truly advances does not offer them death as a solution — it offers them presence.

Rebuilding a culture of neighborliness — especially in cities where anonymity has replaced community — is not nostalgia. It is moral necessity. A society worthy of the name must ensure that no one faces illness thinking that they are alone or a burden, no one weighs their continued existence against the inconvenience it causes others.

This is the real alternative to assisted suicide. Not merely saying no to death but saying an unmistakable yes to belonging. Saying, in practice and not only in principle: *You matter. You are still part of us. We will walk with you. And when you can no longer walk, we will carry you.*

Illinois' assisted suicide law is not simply legal policy. It is a civilizational decision. Either society embraces the logic of the throwaway culture, eliminating those who suffer, or it becomes a civilization of love that bears one another's burdens and refuses to treat any life as expendable.