

Glossary of Terms

Advance Medical Directive (sometimes known as a “Living Will”): a legal instrument that specifies which medical procedures a patient wishes to receive or avoid, should the patient become incompetent.

Anointing of the Sick: a sacrament that is administered to one in a seriously weakened state of health because of grave illness or the infirmity of old age (not confined to the “deathbed” visit, and repeatable if one’s condition worsens). The sacrament can bring the consolation of interior healing and a sense of God’s loving presence.

Principle of Double-effect: a moral principle that provides guidance when an act or omission will have two consequences, one of which is moral and intended, the other evil but not intended, even though foreseen; in palliative care, treatment that seeks to alleviate pain but which also has the foreseen but unintended consequence of shortening life would be morally permissible.

Euthanasia (also “mercy killing”): “an action or omission which of itself and by intention causes death, with the purpose of eliminating all suffering. . . Euthanasia is a grave violation of the law of God, since it is the deliberate and morally unacceptable killing of a human person” (John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*).

Health Care Proxy (also “Durable Power of Attorney”): a legal instrument that specifies *an agent* (or proxy or surrogate) who will make medical decisions on behalf of the patient (or principal) if the patient becomes incompetent.

Informed consent: a decision freely made in the full possession of one’s mental faculties and with adequate knowledge of all relevant moral and medical consequences.

Morally obligatory and morally optional means of prolonging: the moral difference between what one must do (or omit) to preserve life and what one may do (or omit) to preserve life; *not to be confused* with ordinary and extraordinary medical procedures (defined immediately below).

Physician-assisted suicide: a form of euthanasia in which a physician provides the lethal substance or otherwise assists a patient in self-destruction.

Practitioners Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST): a set of medical orders that help give seriously ill or frail elderly individuals more control over their end of life decisions. POLST specifies the types of medical treatment that an individual wishes to receive toward the end of life.

Viaticum: final reception of the Sacrament of the Eucharist in the face of death, as a pledge of our Resurrection in Christ.