



Florida Bishops Urge Safer Course For Terri Schiavo

We continue our fervent prayers for Terri Schiavo, for her family, and all involved in this most difficult and heart wrenching situation. After a fourth consideration of her case, the 2nd District Court of Appeals has upheld the latest order of the trial court judge to withdraw her hydration and nutrition tube. An emergency appeal to the Florida Supreme Court was denied. Barring unforeseen legal intervention, the trial court will soon re-schedule the removal of Mrs. Schiavo's feeding tube. It is most unfortunate that family members have not been able to agree on her care, forcing the Court's involvement.

Bishop Robert N. Lynch of the Diocese of St. Petersburg has spoken in detail to this case ([Concerning Terri Schiavo](#)). His statement followed careful consultation with his brother Bishops and we fully support it. Because of so much uncertainty and dispute, we reiterate his plea that her treatment be continued while all parties pursue a more clear understanding of her actual physical condition.

Bishop Lynch's statement clarifies the teaching of the Church that nourishment or hydration may be withheld or withdrawn where that treatment itself is causing harm to the patient or is useless because the patient's death is imminent. Church teaching is clear that there should be a presumption in favor of providing medically assisted nutrition and hydration to all patients as long as it is of sufficient benefit to outweigh the burdens involved to the patient.

The Church cannot make this decision, but her teaching guides those who must: the patient or those legally entitled to do so if the patient is unable. If Mrs. Schiavo's feeding tube were to be removed because the nutrition she receives is of no use to her, or because she is near death, or because it is unreasonably burdensome for her, her family, or caregivers, it could be seen as permissible. But if her feeding tube were to be removed to intentionally cause her death, or because her life is perceived to be useless, or because it is believed that the quality of her life is such that she would be better off, this would be wrong.

Without question, removal of Mrs. Schiavo's feeding tube will result in her death. We respect the need for finality of the court's decision, but we urge additional time to allow greater certainty as to her true condition. We respect, too, the limitations on new evidence being considered by the court, but in matters of life and death, exceptions should be made. If additional medical treatment can be shown to be helpful to her condition, we urge that all parties involved take the safer course and allow it to be used.

Just as we are concerned for Terri Schiavo, we are also concerned for others who are weak and vulnerable. There is an inherent danger in assuming that food and water can simply be withheld without clearly knowing a patient's wishes. There is reason to be circumspect and ever careful in these cases. We reject outright the euthanasia movement and its utilitarian standard that some lives are not worth living. Every life is precious and unrepeatable.

And finally, we remember there are times when one may refuse treatment that will result in a precarious and burdensome prolongation of life. Properly, this may be seen as an expression of our hope in the life to come. Let each of us communicate ahead of time with our families and loved ones, our wishes for treatment at the end of our lives. To do so will give great comfort to them in an emotionally stressful time.

We join our prayers with the family and loved ones of Terri Schiavo in this most difficult time.

Archbishop John C. Favalora
Archdiocese of Miami

Bishop John H. Ricard, SSJ
Diocese of Pensacola/Tallahassee

Bishop-Designate Gerald M. Barbarito, JCL
Diocese of Palm Beach

Bishop John J. Nevins
Diocese of Venice

Bishop Victor Galeone
Diocese of St. Augustine

Bishop Norbert M. Dorsey, CP
Diocese of Orlando

Bishop Robert N. Lynch
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