



## May God Bless and Keep Terri Schiavo

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**Tallahassee** -- Following recent action by the Florida Legislature and Governor Jeb Bush to reinsert her feeding tube, we urge continued prayers for Terri Schiavo, and all in her family.

In the face of certain criticism and strongly expressed legal objection, the Governor and lawmakers have bravely risked erring on the side of protecting life. We applaud this courage and pray with them that clarity and resolution will follow in this tragic case.

In their August 27, 2003 [statement](#), the Florida Bishops acknowledged the limitations on the court's ability to consider new evidence, but said in matters of life and death exceptions should be made. They urged additional time to allow greater certainty as to Terri Schiavo's true condition. The court's order to withdraw her feeding tube, repeatedly upheld by the appellate court and refused for consideration by the Florida Supreme Court, is based on its finding of "clear and convincing evidence" that she would wish to have her feeding tube discontinued. The courts' rulings reflect careful deliberation. Still, strong and genuine belief persists that new medical treatment will help her condition, and affidavits by physicians and others have created doubt that removal of her feeding tube is what she would want.

In their statements concerning Terri Schiavo, the Florida Bishops and Bishop Robert N. Lynch of the Diocese of St. Petersburg, have clarified the Church's teaching about when it is permissible to withhold or withdraw nutrition and hydration. They have made clear that there should be a presumption in favor of providing medically assisted nutrition and hydration as long as it is of sufficient benefit to outweigh the burdens involved to the patient. They clarified also that there are times when one may refuse treatment, if it would result in a burdensome prolongation of life and that this may be properly seen as an expression of our hope in the life to come.

The Legislature will undoubtedly consider Florida's Life-Prolonging Procedure Act during the 2004 session. The statutory definition of Persistent Vegetative State (PVS) does not square with clinical diagnoses of this condition. Clarity is needed here, but regardless of how this case is resolved, it must never be assumed that a PVS patient should automatically have nutrition and hydration removed. This should never be done without clearly knowing the patient's wishes.

It is our ardent hope that while the judicial system further considers this extraordinary and extremely difficult case, that a true and convincing picture of Terri's wishes and her condition will emerge. This case is even more tragic because the courts are to decide this matter instead of her family. A clear message to all of us is the responsibility to convey to our families and loved ones our wishes for treatment at the end of our lives.

May God bless and keep Terri Schiavo.