

# **PRESS RELEASE**

## **MONTANA CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

**For immediate release**  
December 31, 2009

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### **Montana's Catholic bishops express disappointment in Supreme Court's physician assisted suicide ruling**

A Montana Supreme Court opinion issued today essentially allows that Montanans have the right to obtain medication to bring about their death if they believe their suffering cannot be controlled. The court cited the Montana Rights of the Terminally Ill Act, asserting in ¶45 that the Montana legislature "has carefully cultivated a statutory scheme that gives terminally ill Montanans the right to autonomously choose what happens to them at the end of painful terminal illness." The ruling also acknowledged existing liability limits for those physicians who assist in the suicide. The Supreme Court's ruling was in response to a constitutional ruling issued by Judge Dorothy McCarter in Helena in December 2008.

"Today's state Supreme Court ruling allowing physician assisted suicide is very troubling to many Montanans," said Bishop George Leo Thomas, Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Helena. "Catholic teaching upholds the dignity and inherent worth of every life, a worth that is not conferred by the state, and thus cannot be removed by the state."

"This decision also echoes disturbing actions taken in the states of Oregon and Washington. Sadly this blatant disregard for human life has now been imported into our own region, and complicates an already serious problem," he said. "Recent studies have placed Montana in the top three states in the nation for deaths by suicide based on per capita averages. This suicide trend is so disturbing that the Montana legislature established a "Suicide Prevention Officer" (53-21-1101) as well as a "Suicide Prevention Plan" (53-21-1102) to address the issue. Today's ruling acknowledges that current statute allows for assisted suicide and that there are limits to liability for those who assist."

"We are learning from the decision in Washington and the experience in Oregon that death with dignity isn't necessarily as it appears to be," said Bishop Michael W. Warfel, Roman Catholic Bishop of the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings. "Vulnerable populations, the elderly, the poor, and the disabled can very easily be manipulated into accepting a prescribed death if they feel they are a financial or emotional burden to their families. Proper healthcare should address the problem, not accept prearranged death as the appropriate solution."

"We will continue to oppose legalization of physician assisted suicide in Montana, be that through the courts or in our legislative assembly," Warfel said "As Catholics, we are committed to the protection of life, from conception to natural death, and we will work tirelessly to protect the life and dignity of all."