



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester
1150 Buffalo Road
Rochester, New York 14624

July 29, 2026
Saints Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

On August 5, physician-assisted suicide will become legal in New York State. This is a deeply sorrowful moment in our state's history. Together with my brother bishops of New York, I have opposed this law because it fails to uphold the dignity of every human person, especially those who are most vulnerable.

As your bishop, I write not only to express my concern, but also to encourage you to remain rooted in the hope of the Gospel.

Throughout my priesthood, I have been privileged to accompany many people as they approached the end of their earthly lives. Again and again, I have witnessed moments of extraordinary grace: families gathered in love, prayers offered in faith, reconciliation, forgiveness, and peaceful trust in God's mercy. These experiences remind us that no one should face death alone.

The Gospel gives us a beautiful example in the story of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. When Lazarus died, Jesus did not remain distant. He entered into the grief of those He loved. He listened, He wept, and He brought hope. Before revealing His power over death, He revealed the compassionate heart of God. We are called to do the same—to accompany those who suffer with love, prayer, and faithful presence.

Physician-assisted suicide is often described as an act of compassion. Yet authentic compassion never abandons the suffering or hastens death. True compassion is found in the loving care offered every day by families, caregivers, hospice workers, physicians, nurses, and chaplains who affirm the dignity of every human life until natural death. Modern palliative care can relieve much physical suffering while also addressing the emotional and spiritual needs of those who are seriously ill.

Our Holy Father, Pope Leo XIV, on December 23, 2025, reflected on assisted suicide by inviting us "to reflect upon the nature of human life, the goodness of human life." He prayed that respect for every human life would continue to grow "in all moments of human existence, from conception to natural death." Those words remind us that every life is a sacred gift entrusted to us by God.

As Catholics, we know that our hope is not found in prolonging earthly life at all costs, but in the promise of eternal life through Jesus Christ. At the same time, we believe that God alone is the Lord of life. Our dignity is never determined by our health, our independence, or our abilities. Every person is created in the image and likeness of God and deserves our love, protection, and care.

For this reason, the Church continues to teach that physician-assisted suicide and euthanasia are gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to God's loving plan for us.

Rather than responding with fear or anger, let us respond with greater charity. May our parishes become places where no one feels abandoned, forgotten, or alone. Let us accompany the sick, support caregivers, strengthen hospice and palliative care, and witness joyfully to the Gospel of Life.

Please join me in praying for our state, that we may turn away from what Pope St. John Paul II called the "Culture of Death" and instead embrace a true Culture of Life. Through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Joseph, patron of a happy death, and St. John Fisher, patron of the Diocese of Rochester, may the Lord strengthen us to cherish every human life from conception until natural death.

Be assured of my prayers for you and your families.

United in a common mission, I remain

Sincerely yours in Christ,

+ John A. Bonnici

*The Most Reverend John S. Bonnici
Bishop of Rochester*