

# We Care

From the earliest times, Christ's followers have set themselves apart by their care of the vulnerable (Acts 4:34). Indeed, Christ said, "By this love you have for one another; everyone will know that you are my disciples" (John 13:35). Just as the early Christians were, we too, are called to accompany and care for those who are suffering.

On 19 June 2019, the Victorian Assisted Dying Act comes into effect. This law legalises euthanasia and assisted suicide. Despite what the law may say, our Christian tradition affirms that every life, including those of the sick and suffering, is sacred. For us, euthanasia or assisted suicide are never part of end of life care. Instead, we remain committed to: healing – never harming; relieving pain and symptoms of illness and frailty; withdrawing life-prolonging treatments when they are medically futile or overly burdensome or when a person wants them withdrawn, and never abandoning those in our care.

**Here are three ways that those who conscientiously object to this law can accompany people who suffer.**

## Pray (Heart)

- For those who are or may be convinced that taking their life is the only option left. May God intervene and show them His love.
- That when faced with pain and suffering – ours or someone else's – we respond with compassion and courage. May we do all we can to alleviate the pain of those around us and respect their dignity.
- Seek inspiration by reflecting on Jesus' passion, death and resurrection.

## Be informed (Head)

- Read Pope Francis' [address](#) on end of life care
- Read the section on [euthanasia](#) in the Catechism of the Catholic Church (paragraphs 2276-9)
- Read [The Gospel of Life](#) (*Evangelium Vitae*) by Pope John Paul II (paragraphs 64-65)
- Read [Be Not Afraid](#) and [When Life is Ending](#)
- See how our Catholic health and aged care services are [responding](#) to the new legislation
- Visit [Moments that Matter](#) for real stories of people who have experienced palliative care
- Look at these websites for up to date information on the subject:
  - [Australian Care Alliance](#)
  - [HOPE](#)

## Act (Hands)

- Who do you know who is sick, disabled or elderly and may be vulnerable? Visit them, call them, spend time with them. Show that you care.
- Loneliness, loss of meaning in life and fear of losing dignity or being a burden, are the most common reasons people seek euthanasia and assisted suicide. Help to address these concerns in whatever way you can.
- Link those you encounter with support services. If you're not sure who can help, [Palliative Care Victoria](#) is a good place to start.

Euthanasia and assisted suicide will now be legal in Victoria. All of us have a role to play in caring for those suffering as well as becoming conscientious objectors by refusing to participate.

When we visit the sick and suffering, we visit Christ (Matt 25:34). Given there are over one million Catholics in Victoria, if each of us do what we can, we will have a tremendous impact. We may not be able to change the law now, but we can remove the need for it and resist it by refusing to cooperate with it.

# The Saints

Many of the saints have been bold witnesses of conscientious objection – heroically holding fast to the Truth amid difficult and trying circumstances.



## Blessed Franz Jägerstätter

- Lived: 1907-1943, Austria
- Feast day: 21 May
- Patron of: Conscientious objectors

Blessed Franz Jägerstätter was a 20th century Austrian farmer. After a crisis of faith in his earlier years, he became his parish sacristan and attended Mass daily. A husband and father of four daughters, he was the only person in his village to vote against the Anschluss – the annexation of Austria by Germany during the Second World War. Rejecting the position of village mayor offered to him by German troops, he also refused to take the Hitler Oath.

Franz was called to military training in the German armed forces. However, he was able to defer service due to exemptions. He began to examine the morality of the war and decided his faith could not allow him to participate. Called to military service again in 1943, Franz declared his conscientious objection, offering to serve as a paramedic which was refused. He was arrested, jailed and sentenced to death as a result.

Numerous people including his parish priest visited him in jail to convince him to serve, reminding him of his duty as a husband and father, but did not succeed.

Before his death, he wrote: “If I must write ... with my hands in chains, I find that much better than if my will were in chains. Neither prison nor chains nor sentence of death can rob a man of the Faith and his free will. God gives so much strength that it is possible to bear any suffering .... People worry about the obligations of conscience as they concern my wife and children. But I cannot believe that, just because one has a wife and children, a man is free to offend God”.

Franz was beatified by Pope Benedict XVI in 2007 with his wife Franziska and daughters in attendance.



## Saint Gianna Beretta Molla

- Lived: 1922-1962, Italy
- Feast day: 28 April
- Patron of: Physicians, mothers & unborn children

Saint Gianna Beretta was a 20th century Italian doctor (paediatrician), wife and mother. As well as the busy duties of home and work, she was active in Catholic Action and the St Vincent de Paul Society. In 1961, Gianna became pregnant with her fourth child, however, a fibroma was discovered on her uterus. Doctors gave her three choices: an abortion, a hysterectomy or the removal of the fibroma alone. Gianna refused an abortion. She also declined to have a hysterectomy despite knowing she might lose her life. Wanting to preserve her child’s life, Gianna opted for the removal of only the fibroma. On 21 April, 1962, her baby Gianna Emanuela was successfully delivered by caesarean section. Despite the efforts of doctors, the mother – Gianna, passed away a week later.

Gianna was canonised by Pope John Paul II in 2004. Her husband Pietro and their children, including Gianna Emanuela, attended the ceremony. Pietro would tell Gianna Emanuela, that her mother’s choice was one of conscience as both a loving mother and a doctor. Like her mother, Gianna Emanuela went on to become a doctor.

**“Especially in those difficult circumstances, if the person feels loved, respected and accepted, the negative shadow of euthanasia disappears or is made almost non-existent because the value of his or her being is measured by the ability of giving and receiving love and not by his or her productivity.”**

– Pope Francis

*Address to Participants at the IV Seminar on Ethics in Health Management*

1 October, 2018

