

November 12, 2017: End of Life

Dear Family,

A number of weeks ago when I was discussing end of life decisions and what is and is not acceptable, a parishioner approached me whose adult child, now 18 years of age, had just gone off to college. They were made aware that, now that he is 18, his parents have no more legal say as to his medical decisions including end of life, should he become incapacitated and cannot speak for himself. To be fair, standard protocol is, that should a family member become incapacitated, the doctors still normally turn to the family for guidance on medical decisions. That being said, we are seeing a growing trend where those familial ties are less and less respected.

So, this parent is offering their findings to the parishes as a whole so as to help keep us all more and more informed in this often times confusing arena of health care. Below is what she sent me via email. I reprint it with her permission.

Attention parents: once your child turns 18, they are now an adult. If they become incapacitated, a Power of Attorney for Health Care (PAHC) is needed appointing you (or someone else) as Agent for purposes of making healthcare decisions on their behalf. I see this as especially important when your child is moving away to college, as a healthcare provider in that case may not have had the opportunity to get to know your child and their beliefs and values. This is so likely overlooked as most often, at 18, the child is still on the parents' health plan (insurance or otherwise). Therefore, parents will likely be financially responsible for their adult child's care but without the adult child signing the health care power of attorney, would not have the legal authority to act in their behalf.

For some guidance on end of life issues, the following link is from Catholic End Of Life.org. <http://www.catholicendoflife.org/advance-directives/> I think it is a good summary of the key terms/issues/considerations to begin looking at end of life planning and the documents you would need in order to put into effect a PAHC.

This link – <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/guide/end-life-planning.htm> - will take you to the Wisconsin Department of Health Services website. This will give you a form that, when filled out, will put into effect your choice for PAHC, should you need someone to speak for you on health care decisions.

If you go to the State website, please note that there are four areas of health care under a PAHC that require specific “permission” in your document in order for your PAHC to be able to speak for you in those areas.

Finally, I just want to remind you that a Living Will is not at all recommended by the Church due to the fact that none of us knows today what our end of life situation will be in the future. Therefore, in order to help ensure medical care and end of life choices that are in line with God's teachings through His Church, a PAHC instead of a living will is recommended by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB).

I hope you find this helpful. God bless and Mary keep you,

Fr. Michaud