

**Infused with the Works of Mercy****October 7, 2016****By Tommy O'Donnell**

In the coming months, dozens of states will be confronted with efforts to legalize physician-assisted suicide. Under the guise of compassion and autonomy, the expansion of this practice would really mean the legalized abandonment of people who are terminally ill. Instead of being encouraged to end their lives, patients need proper pain management, care for depressive symptoms (which may be caused by their sense of helplessness), spiritual guidance, and accompaniment as they approach their final days. In other words, we should kill the pain, not the patient!

If you live in one of these states, seek out [your State Catholic Conference](#) and, with their help, keep in touch with your state representatives, urging them to reject any legislation which would weaken society's protection of the vulnerable.

And yet the Gospel calls us to more than advocacy efforts. Pope Francis reminds us of Jesus' demand that our daily lives be infused with the works of mercy. "The Gospel teaches what Jesus' kingdom requires of us... that closeness and tenderness are the rule of life for us also, and that on this basis we will be judged," the Holy Father states in [a 2014 homily](#). Visiting the sick (a corporal work of mercy) and comforting the sorrowful (a spiritual work of mercy) are not add-ons to the Gospel, but, as Pope Francis puts it, they are the "starting point of salvation."

November begins with two feasts related to salvation: All Saints and All Souls. The first is dedicated to those who—like the newly-canonized Saint Teresa of Calcutta—now glorify God with all the saints. The latter feast is for those who may have to spend more time spiritually preparing for the heavenly life. May it compel us to become infused with mercy in this life! The spiritual and corporal works of mercy point to the reality of "the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting."

Moved by mercy, we show the terminally ill and the elderly the face of Christ by our presence and care. We can prepare them to meet the Lord by providing opportunities for sacramental reconciliation, as well as reconciliation with family members who may be distant. The article "[Caring for Loved Ones at Life's End](#)" (available at [www.usccb.org/respectlife](http://www.usccb.org/respectlife)) provides concrete ideas for showing the "closeness and tenderness" demanded by the Gospel. Companionship, as an alternative to the offer of legalized suicide, is what Pope John Paul II called in [Evangelium vitae](#) "the way of love and true mercy," the way demanded by our common humanity.

Bound by our common humanity, all people of good will can recognize how the social fabric frays when suicide is presented as a legitimate choice. As the Year of Mercy draws to a close, the way of love is just beginning, and so we entrust all our future works and legislative efforts to Mary, "[a sign of sure hope and solace](#)."

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Tommy O'Donnell is a Staff Assistant for the Secretariat of Pro-Life Activities, U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. You can find "Caring for Loved Ones at Life's End" and other Respect Life resources at [www.usccb.org/respectlife](http://www.usccb.org/respectlife).