

April 22, 2005

Dear Friends in Christ,

The mystery of death is a reality we must face for our loved ones and for ourselves. The recent deaths of Pope John Paul II and Terri Schiavo bring home ever more clearly the fact that our lives are in the hands of God, and that one day we shall see Him face to face. We know that our lives on earth will not continue forever; yet as believers, we can say with Saint Paul, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55)

At the same time, facing a serious illness or even death, whether expected or not, raises many moral questions. What kind of medical treatment and procedures am I morally bound to accept? What treatments may I forgo? In the event I become incapacitated, who should decide about a course of treatment?

In August of 2002, the Office for Family Life, in consultation with moral theologians and persons involved in the healthcare and legal professions, produced an Advance Medical Directive (AMD). Such a document is faithful to Catholic moral principles concerning end-of-life decisions and is legally recognized in the Commonwealth of Virginia.

I am sure that this AMD will ease the moral and spiritual concerns that so often arise when dealing with the passage from this life to eternity. Faithful to the example of Jesus Christ, the Church has always sought to offer care and comfort to the sick. This document is another tangible expression of the Church's maternal concern. May those who make use of it find peace of mind and soul in the knowledge that one's suffering, while a trial, can always become a source of good when united to the suffering of Christ Crucified.

Faithfully in Christ,

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde
Bishop of Arlington