

MURDERED

IN THE WOODS BY A ROBBER



Where does suicide fit in the increasingly culturally acceptable idea of the "right to die" and to "death with dignity"?

by Matt Wurm

Last November, amid the tumult of the presidential election, Colorado voted with an overwhelming majority to join California, Oregon, Washington, Montana and Vermont as "right to die" states. The network "Compassion and Choices" funded the campaign to pass this measure. These states have joined our Canadian neighbors in making it legal for physicians to assist their terminally ill patients in ending their lives. Combine the increasing medical expenses of the aged with the decreasing workforce tax-base and our nation is likely to see more of the same.

This may appear reasonable to many at first glance because, after all, out of love we "put down" our cats and dog when they become terminally ill, so why not grant competent adults the choice to choose the "loving" option? This physician-assisted suicide is championed as "death with dignity." That phrase covertly implies that those who choose to suffer and die naturally die without dignity. And yet terminally ill cancer patient Maggie Karner, former director of LCMS Life and Health Ministries, approached death with all dignity because she let God be God and end her earthly life at His appointed time and not her own. This is what God's Word calls us to do. But what about those who do choose to go against God's will and end their own lives by suicide?

The hard facts

Suicide is murder and murder is a damnable sin, period. "You shall not murder" (EX. 20:13). For the



Proactive measures:

- Be in the Word of God and prayer.
- Be attentive to change in personality.
- Receive or encourage both pastoral and psychological counseling.
- Be prepared to call for help and professional intervention.

Visit www.lcms.org/life for more information.



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baptized, the thought of suicide is never to be an option though a government may permit or even promote it. Suicide does harm. The grief cast upon others is tremendous for the victim is also the assailant, making the certainty of eternal salvation ambiguous.

Some may ask, "How could a Christian ever do such a thing?" and then come to false conclusions. One, that he was not really a Christian, or two, that God's grace wasn't sufficient to sustain him in the faith. Our actions do not bring us to faith or keep us in the faith. The Holy Spirit does that work, and the promises of Holy Baptism remain resolute to all sinners. Jesus says, "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand" (JOHN 10:29).

Dr. Luther notes, "I don't share the opinion that suicides are certainly to be damned. My reason is that they do not wish to kill themselves but are overcome by the power of the devil. They are like a man who is murdered in the woods by a robber. However, this ought not be taught to the common people, lest Satan be given an opportunity to cause slaughter."

The evil one is behind suicide as he was the murderer from the beginning (JOHN 8:44). Satan wreaks havoc and the effects of his evil work are depression, depressive disorders and despair that can often lead to the suicide of one who is in the faith. Luther is not excusing the act of suicide or reducing its offense of God's Law. He is placing the blame squarely on Satan's work through sinful man.

Staying on guard

To guard against the works of the evil one, we gird ourselves with the Word of God and prayer. We pray for others and especially our brothers and sisters in the faith. We seek to be attentive to those who are depressed, especially during seasonal changes. We take seriously the head trauma of teenagers that sometimes leads to personality change and despair.¹ We help them receive pastoral care for the spiritual malady and direct them to a trusted psychological counselor. If and when we become aware of someone who has the intent, the plan and the means to commit suicide, we call for a trained police officer to intervene and assist this person toward preserving life.

Some practical things that you can do to support those who grieve because of a suicide is join with them in their grief and shoulder some

¹ psychcentral.com/news/2014/04/17/teen-head-injuries-linked-to-greater-suicide-risk/68617.html



How you can help:

- Mourn with the grieving.
- Become educated in the illness of depression.
- Speak of God's constant grace.
- Remember anniversaries.
- Direct the blame at the evil one.

of their mourning like Job's friends when they sat in silence for seven days. You can become educated on depression and depressive orders through books like those of Peter Preus such as *And She Was a Christian* (Northwestern, 2011). Speak and write cards and words of encouragement about God's constant grace. Remember the family of the lost one on the one-year anniversary of their death. But above all, always point the finger of fault squarely at the devil, the world and our sinful nature, while looking to Christ alone for comfort. LW

