



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod



e-News

Letter to Congregations

To: The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

From: Gerald B. Kieschnick, President

Subject: A Statement on the Death of Terri Schiavo and the Subject of Living Wills

Date: April 1, 2005

The long, tortured saga of Terri Schiavo finally has ended. Our prayers continue to be lifted to our gracious God for her family members, friends, and supporters from around the world, many of whom had never personally known Terri, yet offered prayer and support during her life and now express grief at her death.

It took two weeks for Terri to die following the removal of her feeding tube. This would seem to indicate that depriving her of food and water did not permit her to die but rather caused her to die. As Christians, our aim should be always to care, never to kill. This is particularly critical when significant doubt exists regarding the actual irreversible nature of the patient's illness and his or her ongoing desire to live.

But what if we, unlike Terri, should enter irretrievably and unquestionably, without the shadow of a doubt, into the process of death? Would our end-of-life wishes be clearly known to those deciding our fate? Should we create a living will? Does our church body approve of living wills? Are there times when choosing not to artificially prolong life is acceptable in the eyes of God?

Allow me to share some insight on The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod's collective thinking concerning living wills:

The Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod regards it as an appropriate and commendable ethical procedure for people to draw up living wills (or advanced directives, as they are now more commonly called).

Obviously, the decision to prepare a living will is deeply personal, and the decision to activate one is profound. A person's living will should be implemented only when the point has been reached where medical interventions are no longer effective expressions of care but instead involve burdensome, unnatural prolongation of a person's life and artificial delay of the natural process of death.

Christians always strive to protect and preserve life. Again, our aim is always to care, never to kill.

At the same time, we are not required by God's Word to stretch out or unnaturally delay the dying process for as long as modern technology can keep a heart beating. When the God-given powers of the body to sustain its own life can no longer function, and doctors in their professional judgment conclude that there is no real hope for recovery, even with life-support instruments, a Christian may in good conscience "let nature take its course."

Christians may disagree about how the principle "always to care, never to kill" may apply to

specific situations. They may conscientiously take different positions on what can and should be included in a living will that prescribes what medical interventions should or should not be used.

It should be noted, too, that different factors present themselves from case to case. Generally, however, in the final analysis, we rely on and trust the informed judgment of our medical professionals (who ought to be aware of and respect our wishes on this subject) and commend the matter in prayer to our loving and gracious God.

As our church body's Commission on Theology has stated, "Any decisions made in this highly complex area, and any actions taken that may later appear to have been wrong, have been redeemed by that forgiveness which is available to all who put their trust in the work and merits of mankind's Savior and Redeemer."

Finally, I commend to you the words of our Savior, Jesus Christ, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die." (John 11:25-26)

God's grace, mercy and peace be with you all!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerald B. Kieschnick". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and "K".

Gerald B. Kieschnick, President
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod