

Embracing life is better than choosing death

By Christopher Gunty

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Brittany Maynard's touching story is making the rounds of social media these days. The 29-year-old woman has decided that she will die Nov. 1. Told she has six months to live, she chose her date of death, rather than face her remaining months in fear and pain from brain cancer.

I can understand wanting to be in control when illness strikes. The sense of helplessness when faced with serious or terminal illness can be overwhelming. It can also be a great opportunity to experience love and beauty and to embrace life as it comes.

As soon as we are born, we are all dying. We are all mortal. Someday, our time will come, but there is no need to rush it.

Maynard, who lives in Oregon, plans to take a lethal dose of medicine, prescribed by her doctor but which she will administer herself. That's legal in Oregon.

Blogger and author Kara Tippetts, who is also dying from cancer, wrote an open letter to Brittany urging her to reconsider.

"Brittany, your life matters, your story matters, and your suffering matters," Tippetts wrote. "I am sorry that we are both being asked to walk a road that feels simply impossible to walk."

End-of-life issues are hard to discuss. When we are healthy, that day feels so far off. And when a terminal diagnosis takes over your life, choosing the time and terms of death may look attractive. But advances in treatment, pain management and hospice care offer so many more options than just saying goodbye and popping some pills.

It's ironic perhaps that Maynard has chosen Nov. 1, All Saints Day, for her demise. But it's no surprise that her story and efforts to ensure access to such an option is the group Compassion and Choices (formerly known as the Hemlock Society) which promotes self-euthanasia.

The archdiocesan Respect Life Office is offering a panel discussion on end-of-life care planning at seven locations around the archdiocese in the coming weeks. Speakers will highlight the medical, spiritual, financial, practical and legal issues surrounding end of life care.

The church opposes both euthanasia and assisted suicide, but the church does not

insist on using all possible measures to keep someone alive.

"Individuals and caregivers have a responsibility to preserve human life through care and medical science. However, this responsibility has moral limits," says the Maryland Catholic Conference on its webpage. "Extraordinary means that may not alleviate the underlying condition and may excessively burden the patient are not obligatory. Moral decisions about the extent of care should be made in terms of the benefit that may be offered and the burdens that may be imposed, assisted by the medical professional's judgments and a person's sense of what is appropriate."

When my parents were nearing death - a couple years apart from each other - we cherished our final months, days and hours together. We didn't want them to suffer, but we didn't want them to leave. Their pain was managed well. We surrounded them with love, we sang, we read the psalms, we cried, we laughed and we cried some more. In the end, when it was time, we prayed them home.

They experienced "death with dignity," more so than if they had taken some pills and checked out early.

IN JOYFUL HOPE: END OF LIFE CARE PLANNING

All are welcome to join us at a panel discussion of the medical, spiritual, financial, practical, and legal issues surrounding end of life care. Speakers include a priest/theologian to address spiritual issues and Church teaching, a medical professional and/or geriatric care manager to address hospice & palliative care and other considerations, attorney to address advanced directives, funeral home director, and a financial planner. Kindly RSVP to johanna.coughlin@archbalt.org, (410) 707-9842, or <https://bit.ly/injoyfulhopepanels>.

- **Anne Arundel**

- o Thursday, October 23, 2014, 7pm
- o St. John Neumann, 620 Bestgate Road, Annapolis MD 21401

- **Baltimore City**

- o Wednesday, October 29th, 7pm
- o Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, 5200 North Charles Street, Baltimore MD 21210

- **Carroll Co**

- o Monday, November 3rd, 7pm
- o St. John's, 43 Monroe Street, Westminster MD 21157

- **North Baltimore County**

- o Wednesday, November 12th at 10am
- o St. Joseph's, 101 Church Lane, Cockeysville MD 21030

- **Howard Co**

- o Thursday, November 13 at 7pm

- o St. Louis, 12500 Clarksville Pike, Clarksville MD 21029
 - **Baltimore County**
 - o Monday, November 17th, 10am
 - o St. Ursula, 8801 Harford Road, Baltimore MD 21234
 - **Frederick area**
 - o Tuesday, November 18th, 7pm
 - o St. Joseph, 5843 Manor Woods Road, Frederick, Md. 21703
- To read more Amen columns, click here.*

Also see:

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Spiritual milestone: Parishioners make 1 million rosaries for military