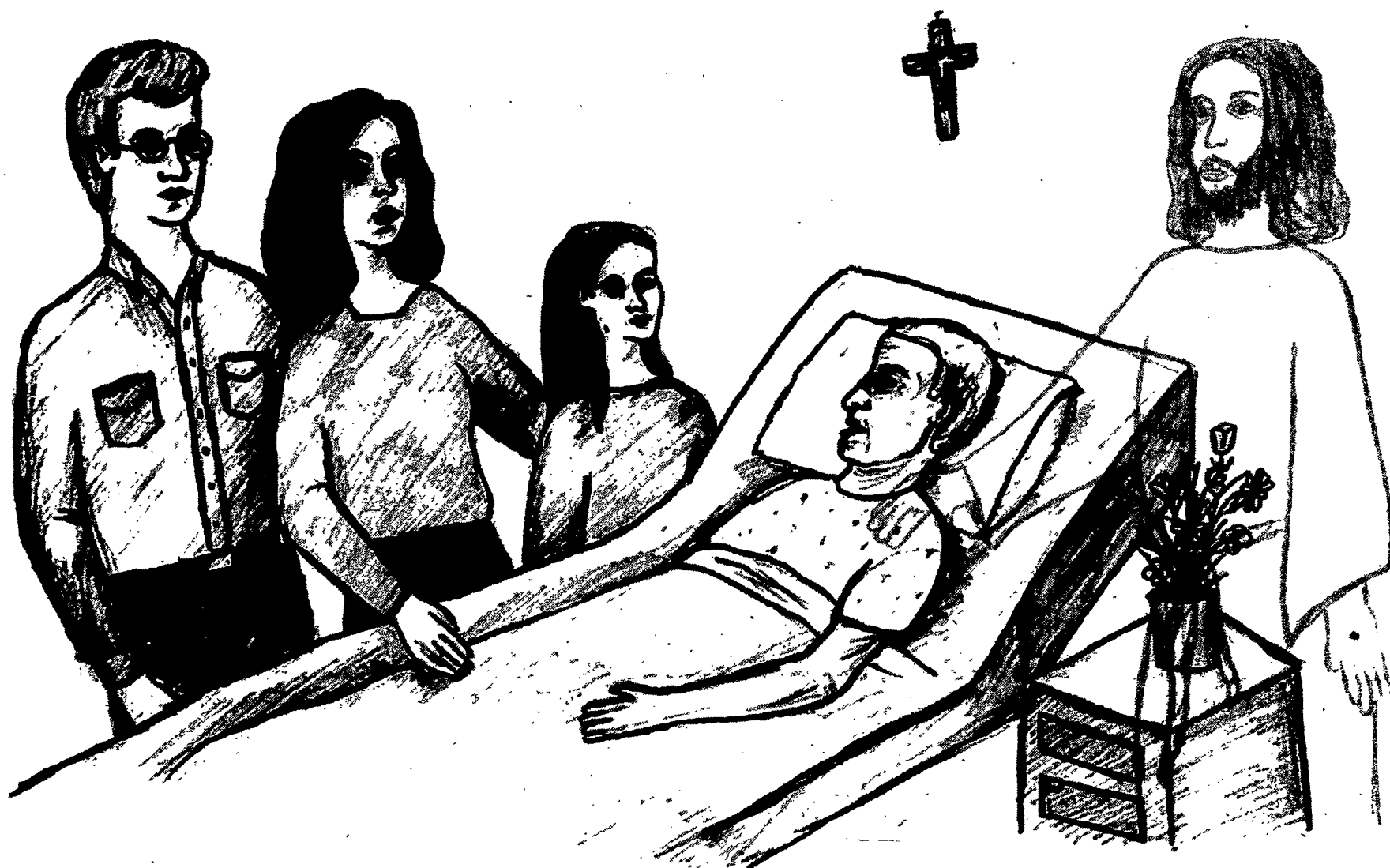


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Where there is dying, there is hope

Father Charles Mulligan recalled a brief exchange with a terminally ill person he recently visited in a hospice.

"I said, 'I'll see you next week.' And they said, 'I hope not,'" Father Mulligan reported.

"Hope" is a term not often linked with death, Father Mulligan noted.

All too often, the focus in the media and in discussions is on mistaken notions of pain and suffering that accompany the dying process, and on such issues as physician-assisted suicide, the ongoing activities of Dr. Jack Kevorkian as he helps people kill themselves, and euthanasia in the Netherlands, where it is legal, but where an increasing number of patients have been killed without their prior — and required — approval.

Yet the ability to connect hope with death is very much a part of what the Catholic faith brings to end-of-life issues, acknowledged Father Mulligan, the co-pastor of St. Michael's Parish, Penn Yan, and its mission, St. Andrew's Parish, Dundee.

"Jesus understood death," Father Mulligan said. "The Lord knows from the inside what we go through. We've got that Companion with us who went through it, and is there with us."

Moreover, the church holds out the hope of life beyond physical death, noted Sister Margot Mann, SSJ, coordinator of mission and values and a chaplain at St. Joseph's Hospital, Elmira.

"I think anyone who is a faith-filled person realizes that we are not meant to live here forever. This is the way to move into a new existence with God," Sister Mann said. "I think if we recognize this, it makes it much easier."

All too often, however, people's responses to death are rooted in fear, noted Kathleen Quinlan, director of Isaiah House, a home for the dying in Rochester.

"I think people are not afraid of the moment of death, but of the process of dying," Quinlan suggested. That fear focuses on facing pain — even though current medications can alleviate almost all pain — and the loss of control, power or dignity.

"I have heard so many people say, 'Oh, I don't want to be a burden,'" Quinlan said. "This is the reason people go to Jack Kevorkian."

According to Robert Nowell, author of the 1972 book, *What a Modern Catholic Believes about Death*, the secular view of death "is to look at only the negative and annihilatory aspects, and thus avoid facing up to the ultimate fact of death."

"Because of hope in the resurrection the Christian can accept death while refusing to accept its negative and annihilatory aspects," Nowell wrote. At the root of the Christian attitude toward death, he said, "is an ability to laugh at death because through our faith we know that death has been cheated of its prey. ... The Christian laughter at death is an affirmation of life, not an expression of stoic despair."

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