

# Designating a proxy is a loving act

When you go to church this Sunday, you will be invited to consider the possibility of designating a health-care proxy.

A health-care proxy is a person empowered by you, usually through written instrument, to represent your wishes about medical treatment if illness or accident were to render you incapable of expressing those views yourself.

Your designation of a health-care proxy does not confer upon that person the right to do whatever he or she may judge best for you should you be incapacitated.

Rather, your commission to your proxy is to make decisions consistent with the values and guidelines you establish and make known to your proxy.

For example, if I served as health-care proxy for someone who does not want to use extraordinary means to prolong his or her life, I would not be free to permit some invasive treatment of that person, or his or her participation in some risky, experimental program.

If, on the other hand, the person for whom I serve as proxy expressed a desire for aggressive treatment, I would be obliged to participate in the decision-making process according to that individual's wishes.

This is clearly a sensitive issue and one that calls for careful thought. I am happy for those reasons that our parishes can encourage people to think, pray and talk about the subject, and provide some support and guidance for them as they do so.

I hope you will agree that attention to the issue of health-care proxies is very much in keeping with our Synod priority of standing for a consistent ethic of life. It

## along the way



BY BISHOP MATTHEW H. CLARK

speaks to the question of respect for our own life even when it is weakened and quite vulnerable. It touches the respect others wish to pay to our dignity and freedom even when we are incapacitated. And it manifests a reverence for those who care deeply about us.

When we are not clear about our wishes, those people easily can be left in a confused and uncertain state. They can feel guilty because they think they did not do enough for us. They can also feel guilty if they think they put us through too much so that we can cling to life.

When we give attention to such questions as the possibility of a health-care proxy, we are more inclined than we normally are to be in touch with what our faith has to say to us about God's love for us, about the human condition and, in particular, about the God-given dignity of every human person.

That kind of reflection usually opens us to a deeper awareness that we are made in the image and likeness of God; that our dignity is God-given and does not depend on our achievements, possessions, power or usefulness; that our bodily death introduces us not to oblivion but to fullness of

life with the Risen Christ; that the experience can call people to deeper insights about life and to more compassionate relationships with one another.

Having said all of that — and I believe every word of it — I have a confession to make: I have not yet designated a health-care proxy to represent me if and when I should need such help. However, I can tell you in all honesty that I will have one in the very near future. For that I am grateful to those who developed this initiative. It has moved me from a general intention to name a health-care proxy to direct action to get it done. If you ask me why I needed the extra push, I suppose I could give you a song and dance about being busy or forgetting to take action. But I really think I have avoided the issue because of the emotional challenge that comes when we deal with our own vulnerability and mortality.

I want to name a health-care proxy because I believe it is a responsible and appropriate act of good stewardship exercised for my own well-being. I also want to name one so that, should I ever become incapacitated, those who care for me will not be burdened by uncertainty about how best to express their love and care for me.

Please take some time to think about this question and to read the materials that will be provided for you on Sunday. Should you desire further information about the subject or wish to discuss it with knowledgeable parties, please contact your parish. I know they will be willing to help, either by direct service or helpful referral.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Peace to all.

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