

# WORLD & NATION

## Justices question implications of suicide cases

WASHINGTON (CNS) — As the Supreme Court considers whether there is a constitutional right to have a doctor help one commit suicide, the complex ethical and social issues underlying the question came to the forefront of national news.

The court heard oral arguments Jan. 8 in cases from Washington state and New York in which the federal appeals courts ruled that patients have a constitutional right to have their doctors provide them with the means to commit suicide. Rulings are expected before the court adjourns in July in the cases, *Washington vs. Glucksberg* and *Quill vs. Vacco*.

The *Quill* of the second case is a Rochester physician who acknowledged he supplied a patient with the pills she used to kill herself.

As the justices weighed the societal implications, advocates ranging from physicians to people with disabilities called press conferences or rallied outside the Supreme Court building.

In hearing the cases, the justices appeared worried that legalizing physician-assisted suicide might lead to acceptance of euthanasia for less-critically ill people.

Although attorneys arguing in favor of physician-assisted suicide insisted such a right should and could be limited only to those in the final stages of terminal illness, several justices questioned whether finding such a constitutional right would be necessary or wise.

Among the issues raised was whether the court would be justified in invalidating in one fell swoop the laws of every state prohibiting assisted suicide. They questioned whether the 10 years or so since the subject arose in the United States have provided sufficient national



Gregory Dugan of Washington (left) leads a demonstration against assisted suicide Jan. 8 outside the Supreme Court. Justices heard oral arguments that day in two cases seeking to overturn state laws prohibiting assisted suicide.

experience upon which the court could base a constitutional finding.

And they raised the assertions of some of the friend-of-the-court briefs filed in the cases that there is no realistic way of confining the use of assisted suicide to only those terminally ill people who choose it according to strict guidelines.

Several of the justices focused on the contentions of opponents of assisted suicide who argue that legalization would start a slide toward including people who are not necessarily terminally ill.

"The difficulty I have is I'm not sure how I should value or weight those restrictions," said Justice David Souter, questioning whether laws defining the eligible class of terminally ill people facing imminent death would see a "slippage" to include others.

Outside the court, advocates for the disabled said such a slide away from the narrowly defined group of dying patients would inevitably include people like themselves.

"We're not dead yet! We want to live!" was the demonstrators' refrain.

"They're killing us now. Our people are dying of 'Do not resuscitate' orders. We are the targets," said Lucy Gwin of Rochester, N.Y., founding editor of *Mouth*, a monthly advocacy magazine for people with disabilities.

"It's incredibly important that we cluster together, support each other, love each other, cherish each other," Mary Jane Owen, executive director of the National Catholic Office for Persons With Disabilities, told the crowd.

"Who is terminal? We all are!" she said.

"We are all vulnerable. We are all fragile."

At a press conference Jan. 7, doctors and attorneys raised what they said are unaddressed issues in the debate.

Dr. Kathleen M. Foley, co-chief of the Pain and Palliative Care Service of New York's Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center, said the decisions under review "devalue the dying patient and in the name of compassion have developed a post-modern view of the treatment of suffering which is to 'kill the sufferer.'"

At the press conference hosted by the National Right to Life Committee, speakers argued that public support for assisted suicide and the rulings from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 2nd Circuit and for the 9th Circuit are based on the unrealistic perception that a right to suicide is something that can be limited to terminally ill people who rationally choose it.

What that conclusion fails to address, said the speakers, is the factor of depression in suicidal wishes and the possibility that people with treatable pain, disabilities and other nonterminal conditions will be treated as if their lives are worthless.

"Wrongful killing of people with disabilities is already occurring," said Diane Coleman, an attorney and co-founder of Not Dead Yet, an organization of people with disabilities. "Court after court has already declared that people with disabilities are essentially the same as people with terminal illnesses in that the state's obligation to protect our lives is somehow diminished."

Adequate treatment of pain and depression are too little understood by physicians, who may project their personal fears of dying onto patients, encouraging the decision to choose suicide over medication, Foley said.

## CALENDAR

### All Dioceses

#### Meetings

■ **JAN. 19-20** — Martin Luther King: Peace Lock-In for Teens; St. Stephen's Church, 48 Pulteney St., Geneva; 7:30 p.m. Sun.-3 p.m. Mon.; \$5 per person; for more information call Lisa, 716/288-1148 or Kathy, 315/585-6178.

#### Religious Activities

■ **JAN. 21-22** — Annual March for Life: in Washington, D.C.; bus leaves St. Mary's Church, Waterloo, 10:30 p.m. Tuesday, returns midnight Wednesday; to reserve a seat, send pre-payment of \$35 to Kathy Peters, 17 Huff St., Waterloo, NY 13165 (payable to Finger Lakes Area Right to Life); for more information call 315/539-8860 or 315/331-2297.

■ **JAN. 21-22** — Annual March for Life: in Washington, D.C.; bus will leave St. Jude's Church, 4100 Lyell Rd., Rochester, 10 p.m. Tuesday, returns midnight Wednesday; preceded by 8 p.m. prayer services; \$45 per person; for reservation, information, call 716/586-3956.

#### Social Activities

■ **SAT, JAN. 18** — Ice skating: for Catholic Twenties/Thirties and their friends; sponsored by the Young Adult Planning Commit-

tee of the Diocese of Rochester; Thomas Creek Ice Arena, 80 Lyndon Rd., Fairport; 2:15 p.m.; skating, \$4.50, skate rental, \$2.50; for more information call Karen, 716/328-3228.

### Chemung Schuyler

#### Fundraisers

■ **SUN, JAN. 19** — Pancake breakfast: sponsored by the Catholic Education Fund; St. Mary's of the Lake, 905 N. Decatur St., Watkins Glen; 8:30-11:30 a.m.; \$3 for adults, \$2, children or \$10 per family; for more information call the parish office, 607/535-2786.

### Monroe County

#### Fundraisers

■ **SAT, JAN. 18** — Casino night: St. Charles Borromeo Parish Center, 3003 Dewey Ave., Greece; 7 p.m.-midnight; no cover charge; all welcome.

■ **SUN, JAN. 19** — Ziti dinner: sponsored by the Rotary Club of Greece; Mother of Sorrows & Latta Hall, Mt. Read Blvd. & Latta Rd., Greece; 11:30 a.m.-5 p.m.; \$6 for adults, \$3, children 12 and under; for information call 716/225-0915.

#### Meetings

■ **THU, JAN. 16** — Downtown Community Forum: "Freedom from Physical Pain with Tasso Spanos"; Dugan Center at St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Pl., Rochester; 5-7 p.m.; wine, cheese & munchies; for more information call 716/232-7140.

#### Religious Activities

■ **THU, JAN. 16** — Centering prayer: Guardian Angels Church, 2061 E. Henrietta Rd., Rochester; 7:30-8:30 p.m.; for more information call Nancy, 716/334-0036.

■ **THU, JAN. 16** — Evening of prayer: Mercy Prayer Center, 65 Highland Ave., Rochester; 7:30-9 p.m.; for anyone impacted by HIV/AIDS; for more information call 716/473-6893.

■ **THU, JAN. 16** — Registration deadline: for Jan. 24-26 retreat, "Love Is a Moment of Silence"; Mercy Prayer Center, 65 Highland Ave., Rochester; Fri. 7:30-9:30 p.m., Sat. 10 a.m.-4 p.m., Sun. 10 a.m.-1 p.m., concluding with noon liturgy; Fr. Jim Dolan, SJ, presenter; \$65 donation; for reservations call 716/473-6893.

■ **FRI, JAN. 17** — Renewal in the Spirit: and Secular Franciscans; St. Charles Borromeo Church, Prayer Center, 3011 Dewey Ave., Rochester; 7:30 p.m.; sponsored by St. Patrick's Fraternity; for more information call 716/225-4134.

■ **SAT, JAN. 18** — Liturgy: followed by spiritual sharing; St. Francis de Sales Association, Basilian House, 3497 East Ave., Rochester; 1:30 p.m.; for all lay Catholic women; for more information call Beth, 716/482-3636 or Dora, 716/663-7309.

■ **SUN, JAN. 19** — Holy hour: "Light a Candle for Life"; sponsored by the Holy Trinity Consistent Life Ethic Committee; Holy Trinity Church, 1460 Ridge Rd., Webster; 3-4 p.m.; with Fr. Albert Shamon; for information call 716/265-1616.

■ **MON, JAN. 20** — Registration deadline: for Jan. 24-26 Enneagram I, "Beneath the Mask," sponsored by the Mercy Prayer Center, and the SSJ Spirituality Center, 402 Rogers Pky., Rochester; Fri. 7-9 p.m., Sat. 9 a.m.-4 p.m. (lunch included), Sun. 1-4 p.m.; Ruth Schlehr, RSM, presenter; \$65 donation; for reservations or information call 716/473-6893.

■ **TUE, JAN. 21** — Sessions: "Yoga and Contemplation"; sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center, 402 Rogers Pky., Rochester; 7:30-9 p.m.; also Feb. 4, 18, March 4, 18; \$10 a session; for information call 716/336-4370.

■ **WED, JAN. 22** — Study program: "Lord, Teach Us to Pray"; sponsored by the Sisters of St. Joseph Spirituality Center; SSJ Motherhouse, 4095 East Ave., Rochester; 2-4 p.m.; \$10 per meeting; for more information call 716/336-4371.

■ **WED, JAN. 22** — Heal-

ing Mass: Church of the Assumption of Our Lady, 20 East Ave., Fairport; 7:30 p.m.; Fr. Paul Walsh, celebrant.

#### Social Activities

■ **FRI, JAN. 17** — TGIF: St. Louis Single Adult Ministry; Hattie's at The Strathallan, 550 East Ave., Rochester; 5:30-7:30 p.m.; for information call Pat, 716/461-1745.

■ **SAT, JAN. 18** — Gala ball: sponsored by Federation of German-American Societies; Mapledale Party House, 1020 Maple St., Rochester; cocktails, 5:30 p.m., dinner, 7 p.m., dancing, 9 p.m.; for tickets, information call 716/288-3368.

■ **SAT, JAN. 18** — Reservation deadline: for Jan. 25 card party and luncheon, sponsored by the Catholic Women's Club of Rochester; Monroe Golf Club, 155 Golf Ave., Pittsford; 10:30 a.m.-3 p.m.; \$17 per person; for information, reservations call 716/461-9173, 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m., Mon./Wed./Fri.

### Seneca Cayuga

#### Religious Activities

■ **MON, JAN. 20** — Living rosary: presented by the Oost Council 10771 Knights of Columbus; Ss. Peter and Paul Church, Washington and Perine Streets, Adams; 7 p.m.