

# WORLD & NATION

## Archbishop supports withholding nutrition



CNS/Reuters

### Shelter from the storm

Rosalyn Clark takes cover from Hurricane Georges inside the Louisiana Superdome Sept. 27. The covered stadium was open to residents seeking emergency shelter from heavy rain and winds.

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Archbishop Thomas C. Kelly of Louisville, Ky., said he supports the decision of Michele Finn to remove her husband's feeding tube and let him die.

"Her decision is within the church's realm of acceptable moral decisions" for such cases, the archbishop said Sept. 23 in a telephone interview.

Hugh Finn, 44, was a television news anchor in Louisville when an auto accident in 1995 ruptured his aorta and deprived his brain of oxygen.

Although doctors saved his life, he was severely disabled. In 1996 he was moved to Annaburg Manor nursing home in Manassas, Va.

At a recent court hearing in Virginia over removal of Finn's life support, three doctors testified that he is in a persistent vegetative state and will not recover.

Hugh Finn's sister, Karen, supported Michele Finn's decision to terminate life support, but initially Hugh's parents and five brothers opposed it. Prince William County Circuit Court Judge Frank A. Hoss Jr. ruled in favor of Mrs. Finn's request to remove her husband's feeding tube.

As a deadline for appealing the judge's ruling approached, the Finn family members who had opposed Mrs. Finn's decision announced Sept. 28 that at a family meeting they all agreed to removal of the feeding tube and would not appeal the court ruling.

Virginia legislator Robert G. Marshall, whose interventions with state agencies to seek a reversal of Hoss' decision turned the case into a widely reported public controversy, said he would continue to fight

against removal of the feeding tube.

Before the family reached an agreement, Archbishop Kelly said Mrs. Finn, who continues to live in Louisville, felt "very embattled" by the controversy.

"When Michele came to this decision and was pretty badly opposed by the family and the church in Virginia, I wrote her a letter," he said.

"I said the responsibility was hers ... and we, the Catholic family here in Louisville, would support her decision," he said.

He told CNS that the question of removal of artificial nutrition and hydration from a patient in a persistent vegetative state with no hope of recovery is "a gray area" in Catholic ethical teaching.

"It's a very difficult question," he added. "If you analyze it in terms of ordinary and extraordinary means, you may come down on one side of the question; if you analyze it in terms of benefit and burden, you may come down on the other."

The U.S. bishops' "Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services," most recently revised in 1994, says, "We have a duty to preserve our life and to use it for the glory of God; but the duty to preserve life is not absolute, for we may reject life-prolonging procedures that are insufficiently beneficial or excessively burdensome. ...

"There should be a presumption in favor of providing nutrition and hydration to all patients, including patients who require medically assisted nutrition and hydration, as long as this is of sufficient benefit to outweigh the burdens involved to the patient."

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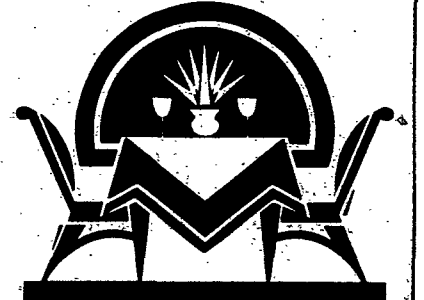
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