

Living Will Forum Guidelines

The Living Will Forum is a successful format for presenting the sometimes confusing facts surrounding Advance Directives and end of life decisions. The forum panel consists of three members: an attorney, a physician and a priest to speak from a legal, medical, and theological perspective. A representative from TransLife, a local organ and tissue donation organization is also invited to provide information. The usual agenda follows this format:

Agenda:

- Opening Prayer – 5 minutes
- Introduce Panel – 5 minutes
- Attorney presentation – 30 minutes
- Physician presentation – 30 minutes
- Priest presentation – 30 minutes
- Q and A Period – 30 minutes

Organizing a Living Will Forum at Your Parish

1. Contact the Office of Advocacy and Justice with a tentative date several months in advance. The Office of Advocacy and Justice will contact the speakers to confirm the date. You will be sent a packet of information to help you prepare and that you may want to make available to your participants.
★RECOMMENDED:
 - A 2 – 2 ½ hour block after one of the Sunday masses tends to get the best attendance.
 - Scheduling 4-6 months in advance allows plenty of time to reserve the space and publicize the event.
 2. Begin publicizing the event with bulletin and pulpit announcements. Sample announcements are included in the packet of materials. The Office of Advocacy and Justice will assist by promoting in the weekly diocesan E-scroll, Florida Catholic, and office newsletters.
★RECOMMENDED:
 - Ask people to RSVP to keep track of attendance. Forums that have been promoted well have had 100+ attendees. To be respectful of our presenters' time the Office of Advocacy and Justice reserves the right to cancel a forum with 20 or less people 1 week prior to the event.
 - Network with other nearby parishes to reach a wider audience.
 - Ask parish ministries to commit to bringing their members to the forum. Reach out particularly to Bereavement teams and Ministry to the Sick groups.
 3. Prepare copies of materials for participants. The sample packet from the Office of Advocacy and Justice includes copies of the speakers' presentations, background on Catholic social teaching and end of life issues (such as cremation, organ donation, nutrition & hydration, etc.), the Catholic Declaration on Life and Death (Living Will), articles, and more. These materials may be reproduced and given to participants in packets or on a resource table. Limited quantities of the copies can be obtained through the Office of Advocacy and Justice.
 4. Keep in touch with the presenters. Once the speakers are confirmed you will be sent all of their contact information. Introduce yourself as the parish contact and make sure they know where the parish is located and what room the forum will be held in. Most speakers will have a power point presentation; be sure to ask what equipment they will need available (projector, laptop, screen, etc...).
- ★RECOMMENDED:** There no cost to host a Living Will Forum; our speakers all generously volunteer their time. It would be appreciated if the parish offered to reimburse their mileage.

Background

The Patient Self Determination Act of 1991, granted every adult the right to make certain decisions in regard to medical treatment. These rights are spelled out in a "Living Will" or Advance Directive, which contain directions about life prolonging procedures in the case of serious illness that could cause death. As a result of this Act and in response to inquiries on this issue, the Office of Advocacy and Justice has created the Living Will Forum. These provide an opportunity for continued education and dialogue on the teachings of the Church as they impact medical and ethical decisions at the end of life. The Forum addresses the issue from a medical, legal and theological perspective.

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During the Living Will Forum

1. You may wish to provide sign in sheets on the day of the event. You should allow an extra 30 minutes for the registration process. Assign volunteers to serve at the registration table.
★**RECOMMENDED:**
 - Provide coffee and refreshments during the registration process.
2. The parish contact or designated moderator should make any opening remarks and introduce the panel (bios for the presenters will be sent to the parish) and begin with an opening prayer. Be sure to acknowledge the TransLife information table and encourage people to stop by to learn more about their organization.
3. A question and answer period follows the presentation. Allow approximately 30 minutes for this depending on the size of the audience. The parish coordinator or moderator should act as the facilitator for this portion.
★**RECOMMENDED:**
 - Provide an 'open' microphone in the audience so people can be heard when addressing the panelists.
 - To reduce repeat questions, have participants write questions on an index card and have the moderator read the questions to the panel. This also acts as a screening process and eliminates irrelevant comments.
4. An evaluation of the forum is included in the packet of materials. Please provide enough copies of the evaluation for all participants and have them filled out and collected before the end of the program. As soon as possible after the event mail the evaluations (copies are fine) to the Office of Advocacy and Justice at PO Box 1800, Orlando, FL 32802. It is important that we receive this feedback so we can continue to improve the program for future events.

Topics Covered in the Living Will Forum

Physician

Catholic Declaration on Life and Death/
Living Will document content and
interpretation from a medical
perspective

Defines concepts such as:

- Determination of Death
- DNR
- Informed Consent
- Incompetent/Incapacitated
- Terminal Condition/Imminent Death
- Artificial nutrition and hydration
- Comatose/Brain dead/Persistent Vegetative State (PVS)

Life support systems

Organ donation

Can explain the role of EMT's in home care

Can discuss: Palliative Care/Hospice criteria and complement to medical care

Attorney

Catholic Declaration on Life and Death/
Living Will document content and
interpretation from a legal perspective

Can explain origin and background of
Advance Directives

Can explain federal law re: patient self-
determination

Can explain Florida law regarding the
Living Will/Advance Directive and
current statutes

Can explain other pending state
legislation

Can define and explain:

- Health Care Surrogacy: Rights and Responsibilities
- Durable Power of Attorney
- Guardianship
- Legal Determination of Death

Can explain nursing home/skilled
nursing facility policy/procedure

Clergy

Catholic Declaration on Life and Death/Living
Will document content and interpretation
from a theological perspective

Can address Church teaching and:

- Feeding/Hydration
- Palliative Care/Hospice Pastoral Care
- Self-determination/Forgoing life-sustaining treatment
- Proportionality/Beneficence/Double Effect
- Death and the Determination of Death from a theological perspective
- Health care decisions and death and dying (referring to "Ethical and Religious Directives for Health Care Services")
- Redemptive Suffering
- Organ Donation
- Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide
- Funeral Guidelines/Cremation

Pope John Paul II Allocution on Persistent Vegetative State



Contact the Office of Advocacy and Justice with any questions or to schedule a Living Will Forum.

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