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Dear Friends in Christ,

The mystery of suffering, illness and death is a reality that we must face for ourselves and, quite often, with our loved ones. Our faith teaches us, though, that our lives are in the hands of God, and that one day we shall see Him face to face. We know that our lives on earth will not continue forever; yet as believers, we can say with Saint Paul, "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

At the same time, making decisions about appropriate medical treatment for ourselves and our loved ones can be stressful and difficult. What kinds of medical treatments and procedures am I morally bound to accept? What treatments may I forgo? In the event I become incapacitated, who should decide about a course of treatment for me?

Our Church's moral teachings address many of the concerns that burden us in our culture of complex medical technology and moral decision-making. Our faith can assist us in making choices that are morally sound and that respect both the goodness of our lives here on earth as well as our vocation to eternal life.

In order to help ease the moral and spiritual concerns that so often arise when dealing with the passage from this life to eternity, our two dioceses, in consultation with moral theologians and persons involved in the healthcare and legal professions, have produced three documents: a short question-and-answer document concerning medical dilemmas and moral decision-making, an Advance Medical Directive, and a piece with pertinent definitions and instructions. We wish to offer these documents as a tangible expression of the Church's maternal concern for those who are facing serious illness. It is our hope that those who make use of these documents find peace of mind and soul in the knowledge that suffering, while a trial, can always become a source of good when united to the suffering of Christ Crucified.

Faithfully in Christ,

*+ Paul S. Loverde*

Most Reverend Paul S. Loverde  
Bishop of Arlington

*+ Francis X. DiLorenzo*

Most Reverend Francis X. DiLorenzo  
Bishop of Richmond