

# LifeNEWS

PROMOTING THE SANCTITY OF LIFE



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## *My Mom Just Died Of Brain Cancer. Here's Why She Opposed Assisted Suicide*

MARY KARNER

I'll admit it, I'm an adrenaline junkie. And judging from the plethora of new TV shows like "Trauma: Life in the ER" or "Code Black," most of America is too. Except that's my life. I'm a Trauma Nurse. I eat, sleep, and breathe trauma.

Every time I walk into work with a French Vanilla Swirl Latte from Dunkin' Donuts in my hand, life and death are waiting for me. And up until this week I thought I'd seen just about everything. I've performed CPR till I thought my arms would fall off to keep blood pumping through a child's body. I've administered life-saving medication to a patient having a stroke and seen the joy on his face when he regained his speech. I've had a patient fall through a ceiling onto another patient (I can't even make that up.) I've held the hand of patients as they've taken their last breath, and I've hugged family members so tight I couldn't breathe. I really thought I'd seen it all.

And then last week, my mom died. She had a glioblastoma brain tumour. I knew all about it, even cared for patients with her same diagnosis. I knew what was going to happen. But no matter how much I thought I was ready, I wasn't. Death stings. And my beautiful, 52-year-old mother's grave is freshly dug.

But my mom's name was Dr. Maggie Karner. And she was the textbook definition of awesome. Don't take my word for it, Google her. She devoted her entire life to helping others and spreading Christ's beautiful gift of

mercy for all. I'm not sure I've ever heard my mom speak more passionately than when she was talking about the word "mercy." And that's why my mom used her last days on Earth to campaign against a very dangerous use of that word. A "merciful death" some would call it, or a "right to die."

My mom is most famous for a YouTube video that went viral entitled "A Letter to Brittany Maynard." In the video my mom pleaded with Brittany, who had the same diagnosis, not to commit assisted suicide. Unfortunately, Brittany eventually chose to end her life, but my mom never stopped advocating for life. In her words, "How long will it be before the right to die quickly devolves into the duty to die? What does this mean for all who are elderly, or disabled, or just wondering if they've become a burden to the family?" Even while she was receiving chemotherapy, my mom spoke at the Connecticut state house to lobby against a "right to die" bill. The bill did not pass.

### **Difficulty Doesn't Justify Suicide.**

That's why my heart breaks tonight to learn the news that California's governor has just signed legislation allowing residents of the state to take their own lives in the face of terminal illness. This makes five states in our nation allowing assisted suicide.

'My brain may be cancerous, but I still have lots to contribute to society.'

...continued on page 5



Dr. Maggie Karner holds a child during a 2010 Mercy Medical Team visit to Madagascar. Karner, director of LCMS Life and Health Ministries for 12 years, died Sept. 25, 2015 from brain cancer. (LCMS Health Ministry)

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# Editorial

KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER

Soren Kierkegaard defines *despair* as a sickness unto death. This kind of sickness is not akin to the physical suffering caused by illness but is rather a spiritual sickness, when the spirit longs to die but cannot actually bring death about. The sickness Kierkegaard talks about is precisely the torment of being *unable* to die. These distinctions seem all but lost when we respond to the emotional push for euthanasia. It is clear that despair, distress and anxiety are all part of the problem that people are trying to solve by legalising administration of the lethal injection or pill, but do we realise the gift of hope we can offer here?

Kierkegaard reminds us that as Christians we should not think of despair as a sickness unto death, because for us "death is itself a passing into life. For that matter, in Christian terms, no earthly, physical sickness is unto death. For death is no doubt the end of the sickness, but death is not the end."

Kierkegaard is talking about eternal life. Gene Veith, in our chat about *Life, Death & Hamlet* (p4) echoes this - he says we cannot be done with death even after death. Kierkegaard's anthropology depends on the knowledge that every person is a 'self' *before*

God. Man is made eternal and so our selves are with us even beyond death. Only 'selves' can suffer torment. This despair, this death, that can overshadow our physical life is so terrible that Kierkegaard calls it sin. But through Christ's death and resurrection we have been given the life giving elixir that frees us from this torment and brings us into life eternally. This changes everything for us as we contemplate physical death.

The front page piece is written by the daughter of Maggie Karner who was quite inspiring in her living and dying. She made some wonderful contributions to *Lutherans for Life* and *Life and Health Ministries* in the LCMS. When I read Mary's reflections on her mother's death some time ago I was moved by how Maggie's family faithfully carried her through death's dark shadows into eternal life. Not at all easy or enjoyable, but rich and spiritually rewarding. I certainly found encouragement in their story.

Finally, don't forget to check out our new LFL website [lutheransforlife.lca.org.au](http://lutheransforlife.lca.org.au). A big thanks and well done to the LFL team for bringing this baby to life. It will be great to watch her grow and develop in service to her church.



## Lutherans for Life Online

Check out our new website

[www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au](http://www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au)

and don't forget to sign up for LFL eNews!

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## Contact us

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## Life New Editor

[LN.editor@gmail.com](mailto:LN.editor@gmail.com)

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consider making a financial gift to continue the promotion and protection of human dignity in our culture and community.

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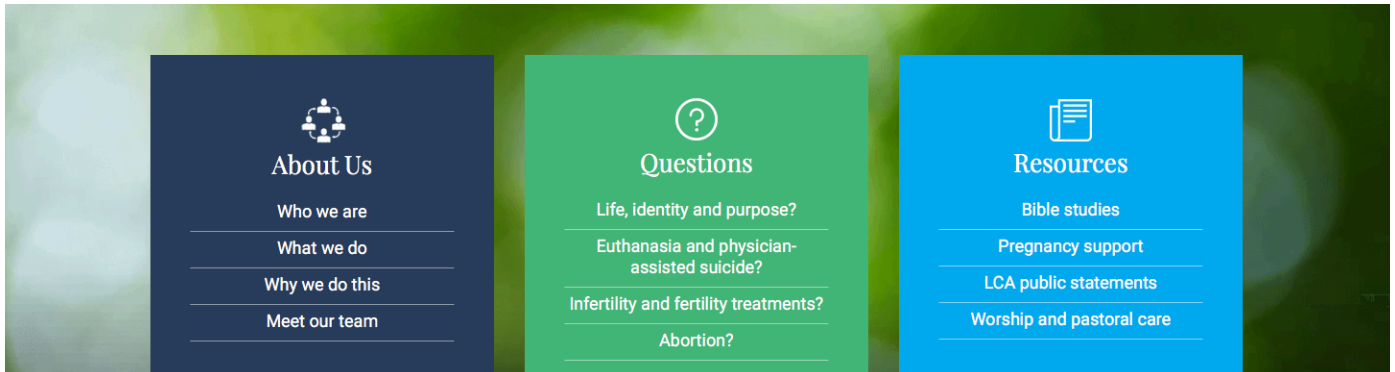
# New LFL Website



Promoting the sanctity of life



[Home](#) [About Us](#) [Pre-Birth Issues](#) [Life Issues](#) [End of Life Issues](#) [Resources](#) [Contact](#) [Search](#)



For quite some time now the LFL committee have been working toward a new website. We are now pleased to say it is up and running! You can visit the site at [www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au](http://www.lutheransforlife.lca.org.au).

The website is designed as a resource hub for our whole church as people engage with issues to do with the sanctity of human life. We've had in mind not only our pastors and congregations, but also our schools and aged care facilities. We hope that, for example, a teacher in a Christian studies' class may be able find resources to help explore ethical questions with their students, and a chaplain in an aged care facility might find something to help a family with a loved one who no longer wants to live.

As we designed the site we thought about the journey of life from conception to death. So we saw three main sections emerging, namely pre-birth issues, life issues, and end of life issues. Under pre-birth issues we cover topics like miscarriage and stillbirth, abortion, contraception, genetic screening, infertility and stem-cell research. When it comes to life issues more generally we've explored areas such as identity, marriage, singleness, adoption, sexualisation, suffering and self-harm. In the end of life segment we address dying well, euthanasia and physician assisted suicide, terminal illness, dementia, and palliative care. If a person clicks on any of these headings they'll be able to read a short, accessible introduction to the topic which aims to 'speak the truth in love' from a Biblical perspective.

In addition to these main three areas, there is also a resources tab on the site. Here you can access past editions of LFL's newsletter 'Life news', group study documents with discussion questions on most of the life issues listed above, and the LCA's public statements on a number of relevant topics. There is also a section under resources entitled 'Worship and pastoral care' which has prayers and other rites which can help us as a Christian community care for people who are hurting in the midst of life related issues. Finally in the resources tab there are links to practical pregnancy support for women, couples and families struggling with various challenges in this area.

As *Lutherans for Life*, we believe one of the particular contributions we have to make to this whole area is in how the Gospel can relate to life issues. As such we have endeavoured to keep in mind throughout the website, that these are not abstract issues we are dealing with, but ones which touch real people whose deepest need is actually to know, and be known, by the Lord of Life.

Our thanks go to the LCA Special ministry fund and the LLL for a generous grant we received to make the development of this website possible. The website has been produced by LCA Communications team and we appreciate the many hours they have put in toward this project.

We are excited to offer this website to our church!

Yours in Christ, Rev Joshua Pfeiffer

LFL Chairperson

# *Life, Death and Hamlet: an interview with Gene Veith*

BY KIMBERLEY PFEIFFER

On his recent visit to Australia, Dr Gene Veith, author of *Spirituality of the Cross* and retired literature professor spoke to various audiences on topics ranging from post-modernism to vocation.

At one of his talks, Dr Veith spoke about despair and how it relates to the culture of death that is so prevalent today.

This connection seemed intuitive to me as, in many cases, despair is what drives people across the world to end their life by euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide.

The fear of despair no doubt contributes to the push for the legalisation of euthanasia or physician-assisted suicide in our own country.

However, Dr Veith's reflections on despair and the culture of death are by no means limited to the euthanasia debate. He has broader insights into how we, as a community, conceptualise or idealise death, which I was able to chat to him about.

Being a retired literature professor, the conversation quickly turned to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Here is a transcript of our discussion.

**Kimberley –**

You talk about the culture of death as a product of post-modernism. How can we better understand how death is conceptualised given the time we live in?

**Gene –**

There are different ways we can look at these issues. For example, one way is that it is a horrible thing to kill another human being and another from the perspective of those who want to do these things.

For people who believe life has no meaning, we're just here for a little while then we're gone. Life has no purpose. It has no value. It might have value while we're enjoying ourselves, but if we get old and sick or if somebody else gets old and sick, then life clearly has no value and we should just put them out of their misery.

Post-modernism tells us that the only meaning is the meaning we can create for ourselves. If there is no meaning to life, no objective value to life, then nothing gives life a priority and so life is no better than death.

In the end, these people find themselves wanting to end their lives out of despair. Post-modernism has not found a way to give life meaning and so what

we're seeing is an embrace of death – it is a horrible thing to think this way. From a Christian point of view, it is like what it is to be "lost".

**Kimberley –**

When I think about death from a Christian point of view, I think about heaven, our knowledge of Christ's redeeming work on the cross and the hope it gives us to live eternally in perfect relationship with God and the community of believers.

I know it is impossible for us to fully imagine what heaven might be like but I know that we believe that we must cling to the hope we have in Christ so that we can enter into life through our earthly death.

I think it is uncommon these days to hear people concerned about what might come after death. We read in books of old, such as those by Homer and Dante, an awareness that the soul lives on after death, but I don't think that this presses upon the mind of our time.

**Gene –**

Yes, we probably don't emphasise it as much as we ought. There's a great reflection in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in his "to be or not to be speech":

*To be, or not to be, -that is the question: –  
whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer  
the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,  
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,  
the heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks  
That flesh is heir to, -'tis a consummation*

*Hamlet* here is meditating very deeply about whether it is better to exist or not to exist. He's basically saying to himself, it would be so nice not to exist, wouldn't it be better if we didn't have to bear with the world's calumnies, slanderers and the injustices of the world, if we could all "quietus make with a bare bodkin", if we could cause our own quiet death with a dagger.

Traditionally, the way we handle our heartaches is how we grow as human beings, that's how we grow into nobility, that's where we cultivate our virtues, and as Christians, learn to cling to Christ. *Hamlet* here knows that it nobler to suffer and when things go bad and to battle it out. It is not to take arms against our seas of troubles – we cannot end them by ending ourselves.



*And by opposing end them? — To die, — to sleep, —  
No more; and by a sleep to say we end  
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, — to sleep; —  
To sleep! perchance to dream: — ay, there's the rub;  
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,  
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,  
Must give us pause: there's the respect  
That makes calamity of so long life;*

But at the thought of death's sleep, he knows that death would not bring about the dreams of slumber - ay, there's the rub. The prospect of something after death shoots down all of his notions that death could be better than life, that death won't solve our problem if there is eternal life. Hamlet goes on:

*For who would put up with all this?"  
"But that the dread of something after death, —  
The undiscover'd country, from whose borne  
No traveller returns, — puzzles the will,  
And makes us rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know not of?"*

Hamlet's concern about death is a good Lutheran reflection. Hamlet, the Prince of Lutheran Denmark went to a good Lutheran University in Wittenberg. He knows that there is life after death and that it ought to give us perspective on our earthly life. If you don't have it, that despair, that nihilism is everywhere, and you don't have to scratch too far below the surface in unbelievers to find that. Life after death is our condition so even after death, we can't throw life away.

Gene Edward Veith is a writer and a retired English professor. He is the author of over 20 books on different facets of Christianity & Culture. His latest book *Authentic Christianity: How Lutheran Theology Speaks to a Postmodern World* has just been released on October 10.

He is currently the director of the Cranach Institute at Concordia Theological Seminary and he blogs at <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/geneveith/>

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...continued from page 1

Believe me, terminal illness sucks. There is no way to sugar coat that. It stole my mom from me along with so many others. But it also gave me something that I could never begin to describe, the opportunity to serve her. My family and I cared for her when she could no longer care for herself. We were her left arm when hers was paralysed. And when that became too much, we had the distinct privilege of being able to visit her at her hospice facility during the last month of her life. She was not herself, and many times confused, but she could laugh. Even up until the day before she died. We laughed about seagulls that she thought were drones. We laughed about how much she loved chocolate and McFlurry's from McDonald's. We laughed about all the stupid things I did as a kid. And then when she could no longer laugh, we sang to her and we prayed with her.

My mom said it best in an op-ed in the Hartford Courant: "My brain may be cancerous, but I still have lots to contribute to society as a strong woman, wife and mother while my family can daily learn the value of caring for me in my last days with compassion and dignity."

I'm here to say that she was right. No matter how hard it was and still is. She was so right. And the greatest honor of my life was to care for my mom in her last days. I hope and pray that her legacy will continue to inspire caring American voters to support those choosing to squeeze life for every drop that it has to give. Support hospice and

palliative care programs that give true meaning to "death with dignity." Let those fighting illness and disabilities know that they are precious, no matter what. They should never have to feel for a second that they might have a "duty to die" just because the option is available.



Mary Karner is a Registered Nurse currently working in Connecticut.

This article has been reprinted with the author's permission. It is published online at The Federalist at <http://thefederalist.com/2015/10/06/my-mom-just-died-of-brain-cancer-heres-why-she-opposed-assisted-suicide/>

## ***Debate on Victoria Euthanasia Bill has begun***

October 17th, 2017. Debates have begun in the Victorian lower house as members discuss the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017.

Members in both houses will be given a conscience vote and it could be voted on in the lower house as early as Friday (Sky News).

VIC Premier Daniel Andrews and Health Minister Jill Hennessy claim theirs is the most conservative euthanasia framework in the world, with more than 68 safeguards. But experts are already questioning whether the safeguards go far enough, based on the international experience of patients applying to use similar schemes rising at an average rate of about 17 per cent a year .. Many “argue the program is prone to scope creep, and could open the door to a spike in elder abuse and coercion to take part in the scheme.”

[www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/its-projected-1000-people-a-year-will-access-assisted-dying-by-2030/news-story/1a39ed0cb57f6e2787bd2b1fe1c8f496](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/nation/its-projected-1000-people-a-year-will-access-assisted-dying-by-2030/news-story/1a39ed0cb57f6e2787bd2b1fe1c8f496)

Three former presidents of the AMA in Victoria are urging members of Parliament to promote improved good palliative care and to reject lethal doses which can never be made safe.

International Euthanasia Law expert John Keown has recently critiqued the Victorian proposals in a paper to be published in the *Journal of Law and Medicine*. His central concern is Victoria's failure to make a sound ethical case for the legislation.

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/good-palliative-care-would-avoid-social-experiment-of-euthanasia/news-story/909689ff7df68739a1901c50dd5d5778>

## ***NSW Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017***

Nationals MP Trevor Khan has introduced the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2017 to the NSW parliament on September 20. With an emotional plea, reflecting on his father's death after a debilitating stroke, he stated "too many of us have watched or cared for a loved one with a debilitating illness and seen them die a horrible and undignified death." ([abc.net.au](http://abc.net.au))

Debate and a conscience vote will commence soon.

## ***Dignity as 'status' argued by Monash ethicist***

A recent article published in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* by Monash philosopher Linda Barclay revisited the concept of 'dignity' to examine it in light of power struggles within social relationships. She points out that we grant dignity to another when we treat them as sharing equal status with ourselves. This dignity can not be enjoyed when people are routinely treated in ways that relegate them to a lower status. She goes further to explain that respecting another's autonomy is not the same as treating them with dignity because the violation of a person or patient's dignity amounts in dangers to their physical wellbeing as victims of dehumanising stigma that go beyond respecting another's right to choose. ([bioedge.org](http://bioedge.org))

## ***Emily's Voice report drop in Australian Abortions***

Emily's Voice write that there were around 5,000 fewer abortions reported in Australia in 2016, according to latest figures from SA and WA showing a six per cent drop in terminations. This brings the annual number of abortions down to about 72,000 to 75,000, compared to 2005 estimates of around 80,000 per year

<https://emilysvoice.com/2101-2/>



## ***Possible Late-Term Abortion ban in the US***

The US House of Representatives has passed a bill banning late-term abortions (after 20 weeks). The Pain-Capable Unborn Child Protection Bill emphasised that after that point the unborn child can feel pain, including the pain of being aborted. The Bill has the support of the President but still has to get through the Senate. Interestingly, it should be noted that late-term abortions do not necessarily go hand in hand with liberal nations. Sweden does not permit abortion after 18 weeks and there is heavy regulation in France and Germany after 12 weeks.

<http://www.nationalreview.com/article/452280/advance-abortion>

## ***Quebec study pushes the Assisted Dying envelope***

A study presented earlier this month at World Alzheimer's Day conference in Montreal surveyed caregivers of dementia patients if they think Canada's new assisted dying policy (MAiD) should be extended to those in a terminal stage of illness. Currently the law requires that "free and informed consent" must be given which excludes dementia patients. Of respondents 91% supported the extension with an advanced directive and 72% were favourable to the extension even without a prior written advanced directive. <https://www.bioedge.org/bioethics/nine-out-of-ten-quebec-caregivers-support-maid-for-the-demented-new-study/12470>

## ***Hundreds of UK doctors protest RCOG President's push to decriminalise abortion***

More than 650 British doctors have launched a scathing attack on Prof Lesley Regan, president of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, objecting to her view that abortion right up to the time of birth "should be treated as if they were removing a bunion".

[www.thesun.co.uk/news/4520534/doctors-protest-abortion-relaxed-laws-mums/](http://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4520534/doctors-protest-abortion-relaxed-laws-mums/)

## ***Gene-editing presents hope for cure of major blood disorder***

Scientists at Sun Yat-sen University in China claim to have precisely targeted a single error on the human genome to remove the mutation responsible for a major blood disorder called beta thalassaemia. The gene editing is an advanced version of the biological tool known as Crispr-Cas9 which can snip out sections of genetic code and replace them. The Chinese team claim to have achieved 100 per cent success in mice, but many of the human embryos in their trial were left with a degree of mosaicism, with some cells still carrying the mutant gene. They also did not check the entire genome to exclude any off-target changes

[www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/dna-surgery-removes-genetic-disease-from-human-embryo/news-story/3db76ed899bce1e7e8acd983db40af7d](http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/health-science/dna-surgery-removes-genetic-disease-from-human-embryo/news-story/3db76ed899bce1e7e8acd983db40af7d)



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