
Austria: Bishops reaffirm “no” to assisted suicide. “Serve life, not death!”

In a statement today, the Austrian Bishops' Conference (ÖBK) provided clear indications for legislators in view of a new regulation of assisted suicide. For the Bishops, it is important to support the absolute value of life and to find measures “intended to avoid that the legal possibility of assisted suicide becomes an ‘inner need’”. In their five-page letter ahead of “Life Day” (1 June), the Bishops look into the legislative changes proposed by the Constitutional Court and make a pressing call not to drift away from the principle of an integral protection of life in all of its stages. The protection of persons at risk of suicide is at the centre of the Bishops' requests. Indeed, it is of paramount importance to ensure that suicide prevention is guaranteed, strengthened and remains a priority for the state. This includes ensuring affordable and easy access to palliative and hospice care, a legal right to psychosocial and social support in a crisis, and “closing ranks against the epidemic of loneliness”. For the ÖBK, those who want to commit suicide should be protected from the influence of third parties and should be informed of both their problems and alternative treatments. For the Bishops, assisting a suicidal person must be a “service to life, not to death”. No one – be they private or hospital workers, nursing homes or other institutions – should be forced to directly or indirectly participate in a suicide. Finally, in the run-up to Life Day, the Bishops make a call “not to let indifference and discouragement have the last word on crucial bioethical issues”.

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