

# Wisconsin Update

Newsletter of Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin

Vol. 18, No. 3 Supporting the option of aid-in-dying for the terminally ill Sept. 2008

## My Reason for Voting "Yes" on Ballot Initiative No. 1000

By D. Parvaz

*(D. Parvaz is an editorial writer and member of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer Editorial Board. The article appeared in that newspaper on June 27, 2008 and has here been edited.)*

It's generally thought that having options is a good thing. They tend to give way to consideration and peace of mind.

So I've been following the fight over Initiative 1000 between the "Yes! on I-1000," and their opponents, the Coalition Against Assisted Suicide (CAAS) with interest. Most of the "Vote No" side focuses on fears that people will be forced into ending their lives by greedy health insurance companies or that the disabled and minorities will be targeted for early deaths.

These arguments sound similar to the paranoid ones used by the anti-choice movement, which also contends minorities are "targeted" for abortions. The CAAS also has issues with Oregon's similar decade-old law, claiming that it doesn't have enough safeguards to protect patients. I haven't found any solid proof of that, but even if I had, I'd rather see an improved version of the law here than none at all. Besides, I-1000 has a long list of clearly worded safeguards.

The stealthily funded anti-I-1000 group loves to use the word "suicide." "Suicide" is a loaded word. To be suicidal means to be reckless, maybe a little crazy. Suicide bombers are considered murderous lunatics, and to some, any form of suicide is a sin, period.

I-1000 requires that two physicians diagnose the adult, mentally competent patient as being terminal, having six months or less to live. Patients must be made aware of all options -- hospice care, pain management, etc. The voluntary decision must be followed by written and oral (witnessed) requests and two waiting periods. The patient can change his or her mind after the oral medication is prescribed. For many, having the option is itself a relief -- it's about planning goodbyes and leaving this mortal coil (somewhat) on one's own terms.

(Continued on p. 3, **My Reason for Voting Yes on 1000**)

### September Membership Meeting

The September Membership Meeting will be held in Madison at the First Unitarian Society on Saturday, Sept. 20, 2008 at 9:30 A.M. See the meeting notice on page 5. Come to the meeting and bring a friend.

Visit [www.compassionandchoiceswisc.org](http://www.compassionandchoiceswisc.org) for the latest information regarding end-of-life issues.

**The Day after the Nov. Elections, Let's Have Lots of Death with Dignity Victory Parties**

In the early 1990s, citizens in Oregon used the initiative process to put before the voters the Oregon Death with Dignity Law. On Nov. 8, 1994, the measure was on the ballot in a general election and was approved by the voters 51% to 49%. The Oregon Legislature, unhappy with the voter's action, caused another vote to be held which would, if passed, repeal the Law. On Nov. 4, 1997, the voters defeated the repeal effort and affirmed the law 60% to 40%.

These Nov. days in 1994 and 1997 were historic. In

retrospect, I now realize I should have been celebrating with other supporters of death with dignity in those days. I wish I had.

Not to worry. We do have another chance to celebrate, this time for a victory in the State of Washington.

Chances of a victory in Washington are good. The campaign has filed petitions signed by over 300,000 voters. Most of the signatures were gathered by volunteers. The state is right next door to Oregon, where that states Death with Dignity Law has been a success and the dooms-day claims of opponents have been discredited. Booth Gardner, a popular former governor, is leading the initiative effort. Washington must have the most knowledge electorate on the issue of death with dignity in the country outside of Oregon. The chances are good it will be the 2<sup>nd</sup> state in the nation to legalize aid in dying.

Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2008, is the day after the fall presidential election and the day after the State of Washington vote on Death with Dignity. It's a good time to have a mid-morning party of coffee and pastry in your home, wherever you may live in Wisconsin. Invite your neighbors and invite C&C of WI members who live in your area of the state. If you agree to have a victory party, you will be able to contact our membership chairperson and receive names, addresses and phone numbers of members in you area. This will give you an opportunity to meet and celebrate with other members. In addition, C&C of WI will share party expenses with you. To sign up to have a post election victory party contact Jim Greenwald to let him know that you want to celebrate this milestone in the death with dignity movement and to work out details.

(Continued on p. 3, **Victory Parties**)

**Board Sends \$2500 to the Washington Campaign**

At its last meeting, the Board of Directors voted to send \$2500 to the yes vote campaign for death with dignity in the State of Washington. If a majority of the voters vote yes, Washington will join Oregon as the second state to legalize aid in dying for the terminally ill.

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(Continued from p. 1, **My Reason For Voting Yes on 1000**)

There's something noble in a person's decision to fight an illness or condition until the very end, but there's something equally noble and poignant about a person's choice to put an end to his or her own suffering as he or she sees fit within the context of this law. The Death with Dignity Act wouldn't be a mandate. It would be an option.

And here it comes, the painful, earnest reason I can't imagine voting no on I-1000: my friend, T. I'll only use her first initial because she was a private, at times reclusive, person, who didn't tell many she was ill, and I'll honor her need for privacy. Details will be vague, but the story true. At about 6 feet tall, T. was a lean, knockout of a presence, with a mind like a diamond. She and I are -- were -- the same age, and if I recall correctly, we were about 31 when she was diagnosed with a brain tumor a few years ago. She wasn't scared -- she was furious. Her illness took its cruel, predictable turns over the next four years or so -- shaved head, surgery, chemo, radiation, more surgery, endless exhaustion, vomiting. But T., who wasn't religious, stood strong. During visits, I'd notice that while her wit stayed sharp, her personality started to blur around the edges. The struggle in her was mighty, but the tumor was mightier, and bit by bit, T. lost.

The last time I saw her, T.'s body was still warm in a hospital bed on the Sunshine Coast of B.C., but her heart had stopped beating shortly before my arrival. I can scarcely bring myself to write about losing T., but I also can't consider writing about I-1000 without thinking of her, and realizing that those like her in Washington state who might want to take a minor shortcut to the big sleep. It's either that or suffer till you die, right?

In the end, being for-or-against I-1000 isn't about causing or preventing death. Death will come to every quirky, complicated life. It's about granting - or mercilessly withholding -- a measure of self-determination to those who have lost control of their bodies and in many respects, their lives.

Continued from p. 2, **Victory Parties**)

The name of the Washington State campaign is YES! On I-1000. The name means that Washington voters should vote "Yes" on Initiative Measure 1000. You can become more knowledgeable about the Washington State initiative by visiting the campaign website at [yeson1000.org](http://yeson1000.org). You can also make a donation to the campaign online.

A victory in Washington brings us one step closer to death with dignity in Wisconsin.

### **Aussie Politician Left \$5 Million to Euthanasia**

Brisbane's longest lord mayor left \$5 million in his will to fund a campaign for the legalization of euthanasia. Clem Jones died in December having never spoken publicly about the subject. The legacy was inspired by the ordeal he watched his beloved wife of 49 years endure before her death in 1999.

These are the words from his will. *"I saw Sylvia suffer the most dreadful agony from disease and illness that destroyed her physically and mentally and caused her to suffer day after day not only the pain, but also the indignity of being something that could not truly be described as a human being.... But Sylvia was only one of millions of people who are committed to varying terms of torture by their fellows."*

*"If we have a definition of living of any sort, it cannot include the existence of people simply artificially kept alive against their will and in circumstances that can only be described as totally inhuman or, indeed, barbaric."*

*"I do not, of course, criticize the splendid endeavours that the medical fraternity make to preserve the quality of human life, but when that quality falls to a level where life is one of pain and suffering — or when one's mind can no longer function — those self-same medical practitioners should have the right and the responsibility of releasing persons from that torture, misery and indignity."*

(Continued on p.6, **Aussie Politician**)

## Report on Church Service and Program at the Unitarian Church North in Mequon

On August 10, a gorgeous summer day, Rev. Matthew Nelson, a C&C Board Member, was the speaker at the morning service at the Unitarian Church in Mequon. Rev. Nelson is young, handsome and charming and an eloquent spokesman for Compassion & Choices. He charmed all in attendance as he did in Brookfield and Milwaukee in past years.

In the afternoon at the Church, C&C of WI sponsored a panel moderated by Rev. Nelson. The panel members were Jim Allen, Karen Deiro, Jim Greenwald and Brian McCarthy, who each spoke to the issue of the option of physician aid in dying from his or her individual perspective. A lively question and answer session followed.

The day had a highlight for Shirley Williams, our Board Member who handles Publicity. The Saturday, August 9, 2008 issue of the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* in the RELIGION briefing section had an item captioned Program at Unitarian Church North will discuss end-of-life choices. The item identified Rev. Nelson and gave the time of both the morning service and the afternoon program.

The *Journal Sentinel* item concluded, "Compassion & Choices has more than 60 chapters nationwide. Among other things, it provides education and support on end-of-life issues and seeks to legalize physician assistance in dying."

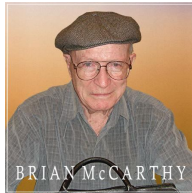


From the left, Jim Allen, Karen Deiro, Jim Greenwald, Brian McCarthy and Rev. Matthew Nelson at the Unitarian Church North in Mequon

## Notice of September Membership Meeting Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin

Invites members, friends and the public to a membership meeting.

**Rev. Brian McCarthy**, a former Catholic Priest and a retired Methodist Minister will speak on *What Does the Bible Say Concerning Death with Dignity?*



**Saturday, September 20, 2008**  
**First Unitarian Society, West Living Room**  
**900 University Bay Drive, Madison, WI**

9:30 A.M. Coffee and Conversation

9:45 Announcements

10:00 Program

**Notice of Second Annual Meeting of the Board of Directors.** This meeting is for the purpose of electing a Board of Directors for the ensuing year and will take place immediately after the membership meeting. All current board members and all members of C&C of WI who would like to serve on the Board are urged to attend.

**Compassion & Choices Membership Form**

**Yes! I want to join Compassion & Choices \***

\$45 Individual  \$60 Couple  \$450 Life Member  \$600 Life Couple Member

*Please supply complete address:*

Name/s \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (    ) \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail \_\_\_\_\_

Make Checks Payable to and Send To:

**Compassion & Choices**

P.O. Box 101810

Denver, CO 80250-1810

Or Call: 1-800-247-7421

Visa or MasterCard accepted

**Dues are not tax deductible**

\* The payment of dues includes your membership in **Compassion & Choices of Wisconsin**. You are invited to call **1-800-247-7421** if you cannot afford the \$45 membership. Every effort will be made to accommodate your circumstances.

(Continued from p.3, **Aussie Politician**)

Former Northern Territories prime minister Marshall Perron, who was responsible for introducing the first voluntary euthanasia law in the world (The Rights of the Terminally Act, 1995, rescinded by the federal parliament in 1997), is heading the committee to equitably distribute the legacy between the various Australian RTD groups.

Dr. Jones instructed that \$5 million be used in whatever way “ his executors saw fit to help fund people” fighting to change the law so patients who chose to end their lives could be given ways and means to do so.

*World Right-to-Die Newsletter, Spring 2008*

### **Debate in the State of Washington: Not All Believe Suffering is Good for the Soul**

On August 10, 2008, *The News Tribune* of Tacoma, WA published Lorraine Hardin’s letter.

In regard to an earlier letter of August 7, Ms. Hardin said, “The writer questions whether ‘Death with Dignity’ is more dignified than facing and accepting ‘natural death.’ She ignores the fact that not all of us share her faith or her belief that suffering is good for the soul.”

“When my grandmother lay dying, she was furious at her loss of dignity. Waiting for a natural death was not, in her mind, a dignified option. Whether or not she would have chosen to die on her own terms, none of us knows. Nonetheless, she should have had the choice. That is what this initiative offers: choice.”

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

*See address label for your membership expiration date.*

<http://www.endoflifechoiceswis.org>

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