



# Catholic Archdiocese of Adelaide

## *Archbishop of Adelaide*

17<sup>th</sup> March, 2021  
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Dear sisters and brothers,

### **RE: Euthanasia bill**

Grace and peace, I hope that this note finds you well.

The Upper House of State Parliament is currently debating a bill to legalise euthanasia.

It's called the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill. Make no mistake, this bill is about State-sanctioned assisted suicide.

Proponents of the bill refer to it as 'dying with dignity' but there is no dignity in allowing or helping someone to kill themselves.

No-one wants to see people suffer unnecessarily at any time, especially at the end of life, but the compassionate way to achieve this is through high quality, well-resourced palliative care.

Assisted suicide undermines the fundamental principle of the equal worth of all human individuals by legally enshrining the idea that some human lives are not worth living.

It legally enshrines the idea that these 'lives-not-worth-living' can be directly and intentionally ended with the aid and 'blessing' of the State.

By making such ideas law, it gives the impression that this attitude is the proper attitude of and for our society. Such a message puts vulnerable people at risk of coercion and elder abuse.

Such fears become heightened when we hear stories of people being left to suffer and die alone, of botched attempts to end their lives and the distress this causes first responders.

But being isolated and lonely at any time, regardless of a person's physical or mental state, is surely no justification for giving someone the means to suicide.

Legalising assisted suicide means that respect for the life of a person is no longer assumed, but depends on whether they have the will to defend their life or have others willing to stand up for them.

People who feel that they are a burden, or who already feel that their lives are worthless are particularly vulnerable.

But we are all vulnerable to that suggestion as there may come a time when we will become dependent on others for our care. We fear the guilt of being a burden on other people, the loss of control over our own lives, and the potential humiliation that can come from having to rely on others for our basic needs.

How much more so would we feel this way if the law was to tell us that we are indeed a burden, that we are right to think that we worthless, and that the right and noble thing to do would be for us to end our lives before we become a burden on those we love and on society?

Such a law denies the reality that we flourish as human beings when we care for others and allow ourselves to be cared for by others. Our faith both informs and guides our thinking on these matters.

Humanity is at its best when people are involved in relationships of mutual love, concern and consideration, sometimes as givers and sometimes as receivers of such care. The law should foster such interactions, not undermine them. How much more so for people of faith!

Let me be clear about the Church's position on end of life choices.

What we oppose is the legalisation of any *direct* action specifically *intended* to bring about the death of a person. This includes the provision of lethal drugs for that purpose or the administration of such a lethal dose by any means for that purpose.

We do not oppose refusal, withholding or withdrawal of medical treatments that promise little or no benefit, or that are overly burdensome at the end of life. What is referred to as 'extra-ordinary norms'. And we do not oppose appropriate intentional provision of medication to alleviate symptoms of pain and suffering.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) has pointed out that these legitimate practices are not well understood by many members of the public, nor by some doctors, and other health-care workers.

In fact the AMA argued in its submission to the Joint Parliamentary inquiry that SA has the most complete framework of legislation supporting good end of life care for patients in Australia.

However, it says these solid foundations in legislation are undermined because individuals are unaware of, or fail to use, advance care planning and directives to express their wishes; because doctors fail to understand their legal and ethical responsibilities in providing care at end of life; and because care in line with patients' wishes is restricted by inadequate resources and poor coordination of services.

Euthanasia is a very emotive issue and goes to people's deepest fears about terminal illness, death and loss of control over their lives.

However when we look through the lens of faith, we see another dimension, we are a hope-filled people and we believe in eternal life.

The importance of accompanying the sick (in mind, body or spirit) in all stages of their illness, and in particular in the critical and terminal stages of life, is central to our Catholic faith. As Pope Francis has said, euthanasia is "discarding of the patient" and "false compassion".

I strongly urge you to contact your local MP and Members of the Upper House to express your opposition to this dangerous bill and remind them of their duty to weigh the long-term social and institutional ramifications of this law.

Maintaining current laws and improving end of life care will encourage a flourishing community in South Australia based on human freedom and human dignity, not introducing laws for assisted suicide.

In Domino,

+ Pat O'Regan

+Patrick O'Regan

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