



CATHOLIC DIOCESE OF ROCKHAMPTON

Prot: 21271:MMsp_1102

21 June 2021

Dear Brothers & Sisters in Christ

Re: Pastoral Letter to the Diocese of Rockhampton – Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) Legislation

In today's first reading from the Book of Wisdom, we hear, "Yet God did make human beings imperishable, God made humankind in the image of his own nature"¹. These words express a belief that is at the heart of our Catholic faith: that we are made in the image and likeness of God and so life, made of both body and soul is sacred and carries a God-given dignity. Life is the first Good that God has given us and therefore we must do all we can to defend and protect life, especially when it is most vulnerable.

This concern plays a central role in the Christian vocation. Today, our defence and care for the vulnerable must be carried out in new and worrying circumstances, especially in the light of the issue of voluntary assisted dying also known as euthanasia. The Queensland Parliament is proposing to legalise euthanasia, with a bill introduced on May 25th. I write to you to voice my concerns and to highlight our Catholic arguments against this piece of legislation that will go to a vote of the Parliament in September this year.

Reasons for the Church's Opposition to this legislation

The Church believes that euthanasia or assisted suicide is a grave moral act because it is the intentional and direct taking of an innocent human life.² It is a practice that is in contrast to the vision of health care from a Catholic perspective, the first principle of which is "do no harm".³ This means that the aim of medical care should be to heal someone who is ill, and if healing is not possible, then to care for that person until his or her earthly life is finally over. Scripturally, we see this approach in the parable of the Good Samaritan told by Jesus.⁴ The Good Samaritan did not abandon the stranger he met on the road, but ensured he received medical attention and other forms of care that ensured his life and dignity were respected. The act of euthanasia as a direct form of taking life is contrary to the actions of the Good Samaritan. Euthanasia is also contrary to other parts of the Sacred Scriptures, notably the Decalogue in the commandment of "Thou Shalt Not Kill"⁵. These parts of the Scriptures call us to influence our society to be committed to healing and never harming; relieving pain and symptoms of illness and frailty; and never abandoning those in our care, and certainly not intentionally ending life.

¹ Wisdom 2:23.

² Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, [Samaritanus Bonus](#), 2020.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Luke 10:30-35.

⁵ Deuteronomy 20:13.

Bishop Michael McCarthy

Countering the Arguments of Compassion & Dignity

Often, the values of compassion and dignity are used to advocate for euthanasia. People refer to the need for a dignified death and that in some circumstances it is compassionate to allow a person to end his or her life. These arguments were made in the speech to introduce the legislation in the Queensland Parliament.⁶ However, as Catholics we have a different understanding of compassion and dignity founded on our first principle of health care: try to heal and if you cannot, then care. It is a principle that is at the heart of palliative care which needs to be more fully available throughout Queensland. Good palliative care is compassion in action for it alleviates pain and suffering and brings calm to a person in the last phase of earthly life. Palliative care, along with the vigil that families keep at the bedside of their dying loved ones, surrounding the person with love and affection and, with the prayers and the sacraments of the Church, form the basis of Christian compassion for a person in the last stage of life.⁷

We also remember that human dignity is God-given. It is not like a commodity and therefore is not measured by the quality of life. From the moment of conception, made in the image and likeness of God, the human person carries that dignity into eternity. Dignity never leaves us. We uphold dignity by the care, respect and love we give and not by intentionally taking life away.⁸

Many of us will have experienced what it is like to journey with a loved one in the last stage of his or her life. At that time, just like a baby in the womb, the human person is totally vulnerable. However, when our terminally ill loved ones are accompanied with good palliative care, and with love, and respect for their dignity and for their inalienable right to life as a human person made in the image of God, they can continue to live fulfilled lives to the very end.

Conclusion

In this present age, we will find that our faith will be counter cultural on many issues. The issue of euthanasia is one of them. There is a strong view in the community that this legislation ought to be enacted by our Parliament. Already, Members of Parliament are seeking the views of their electorates on this issue. I ask that we make sure that our Catholic voice is heard in this debate as a voice that seeks to defend the right to life, especially for our vulnerable and elderly people. Please try not to be wearied by yet another challenge to our values. We have Christ and his message of hope for the world, and it is a hope that needs to be proclaimed to people when the horizon of the end of their earthly life appears. As Catholics we have the choice to die with dignity, surrounded by the compassion that is found in good medical care, the love of family and friends, and the embrace of the Church by its prayers and sacraments. In choosing other ways to die, we may not always be supported in this way by the community of the Church. I urge you to contemplate being in the loving sacramental arms of our Church so that our dying will be in the presence of our God.

In conclusion I encourage you, the faithful of the Diocese of Rockhampton, to make our Catholic voice known in this debate. Let us continue to advocate that good palliative is available for all, and that euthanasia will not become the “new normal” in end-of-life care, thus opening up new dangers for the vulnerable and elderly that we cannot yet perceive.

May God bless us all.



Most Rev Michael McCarthy
Bishop of Rockhampton

⁶ Brisbane Times, May 25th 2021, “*Protests as Qld Euthanasia Bill is Introduced.*”

⁷ [Samaritanus Bonus.](#)

⁸ Ibid.