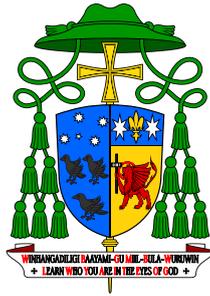


Hope Sunday
1st August 2021



Pastoral Letter for HOPE Sunday - 1st August 2021

Dear sisters and brothers,

Hold fast to the hope that lies before us. This we have as an anchor of the soul, sure and firm, which reaches into the interior behind the veil. [Heb 6:18b-19] As an Easter people, hope is at the heart of the good news we are called to proclaim with our lives. Indeed, it is the promise of the resurrection that enables us to face our mortality with hope. Sometimes, when we are faced with a life-limiting illness, faith can be put to the test and our hearts go out to those in such distress that they want to end their lives.

Voluntary Assisted Dying, often shortened to VAD, is another term for euthanasia or assisted suicide. Alex Greenwich, an independent MP in the Legislative Assembly, will move to legalise Voluntary Assisted Dying for those with a life-limiting medical diagnosis. He has released a draft VAD bill which will be introduced into the NSW State parliament in September.

I invite you to consider why the Church and much of the community remains opposed to this proposed legislation.

In a pluralist society such as ours, those of us with deeply held religious convictions have the same right as everybody else to argue for what we believe is best for our society. The fact that this conviction has its origin in the Judeo-Christian tradition does not mean that we who defend it may be dismissed as trying to impose our religious views on others. Rather, because of our



convictions, what we are concerned about is the common good for all in society.

Believing as we do that all people are created in the image and likeness of God, we have no doubt that all people have a right to be loved from the beginning to the end of their lives. The moral imperative of equality of all, even if frail and infirm, should translate to directing our efforts to treating the sick and dying, rather than developing a legal framework to eliminate them.

The personal decision to request VAD is often driven by depression, yet in some states, VAD legislation does not mandate specialist assessment to detect and treat depression. Other drivers for a sick patient to seek assisted suicide include fear of pain, loss of control or loss of autonomy. Also, those who suffer from illness or advanced age may be made to feel as though they are a



burden to their family or to society, and as such may feel a strange sense of duty to undergo euthanasia. Most who are suffering in any of these ways can be helped through compassionate, holistic medical and nursing care, especially with access to well-resourced palliative care. This should be the focus of legislators – to provide sufficient funding and resources for equity of access to palliative care services – rather than a legalised VAD framework.

If there is a danger that a person will act on thoughts of self-harm, that person can be involuntarily admitted to a hospital with appropriate mental health facilities. We believe that they are suffering from mental illness and we try to prevent their death by suicide. We don't say 'That person wants to die and so it is OK' but rather work strenuously to protect them. We should not see the desired voluntary death of a person with a life-limiting diagnosis any differently.

I note that the Australian Medical Association opposes this legislation, stating that it does not support the medical profession being involved in interventions where the primary intention is the ending of a patient's life. The medical profession and nursing fraternity are trained to support and protect human life - it is anathema to this culture to support a tolerance of legislated killing. By expressing our concern about this bill, we are also supporting our medical health providers who want to provide the people of NSW with excellent medical care throughout their lives, including a good death.





“We are experiencing a strong universal trend toward the legalization of euthanasia. Even in these harsh circumstances, if the person feels loved, respected, and accepted, the negative shadow of euthanasia disappears or becomes almost non-existent. This is because the value of their being is measured by the ability to give and receive love, and not by their productivity.”

(Pope Francis, October 1, 2018)

One of the foundational principles of our society is that no-one has the right to deliberately take the life of another innocent person, or to actively cooperate in doing so. This is the right to life. It originates from our Judeo-Christian tradition and expressed most clearly in the fifth commandment: You shall not kill.

Viewed through the eyes of our faith, euthanasia is fundamentally flawed because of its tolerance of the support of a physical act to produce the death of a person. It contravenes the fifth commandment and undermines the very essence of respecting the dignity of the human person, promoting a ‘throw away culture’ where we don’t care deeply enough about those who face a life-limiting illness to care for them properly.

I worry about the effect that VAD will have on our doctors; they did not become medical professionals in order to hasten the deaths of their patients.

Often the pro-VAD arguments are passionately articulated by people who have been deeply affected by witnessing great suffering during the terminal illness of a loved one, and want to see ‘things change’ in such a way that this is not repeated. It is lamentable that supporters of VAD are often unaware that the end of life experience of their loved one could have been so much better, with appropriate access to quality palliative care services. It is imperative that we ensure that expert and compassionate palliative and psychiatric care are available to all so that mental health and pain management are prioritised, leading to an increased sense of purpose and awareness of personal value and dignity for all.

The VAD lobby has adopted the concept that assisted suicide promotes ‘dying with dignity’. This is incorrect. The dignity of the human person requires an inexhaustible respect for the preciousness of EVERY human life, from conception till death. This respect for each individual does not prevent the removal of treatments no longer deemed to be beneficial, nor the activation of advanced care directives, such as a direction made by a patient that they do not wish to be resuscitated in the case of deterioration.

Our opposition to VAD, comes from deep compassion for those who are suffering. The members of the medical profession who have raised concerns about VAD care deeply for those with whom they work. Many of us carry precious memories of having been with a loved one at the moment of their death and have experienced it as painful and yet profoundly human, to share that journey with them until the very end. Our love of neighbour embodies our respect for the sanctity of human life, from its beginning right until the end - this is how each one of us, made in the image and likeness of God, deserve to be treated. We want to accompany and surround the life of the weakest with the cloak of love and, in this case, through the very best of palliative care.

Many people, including doctors and many politicians, are convinced that this legislation is a dangerous move towards a society which no longer believes in the essential value of human life in all its stages and conditions.

If, like me, you are opposed to VAD legislation, or if you are concerned about it, I invite you to write, email, call and meet with our local members to oppose the euthanasia bill. Please do not let this opportunity pass you by.

Yours in Christ,



Mark Edwards OMI
Bishop of Wagga Wagga

HOPE: Preventing Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide.

HOPE is a coalition of groups and individuals who oppose the legalisation of euthanasia and assisted suicide and support measures that will make euthanasia and assisted suicide unthinkable.

Visit the HOPE website: <https://www.no euthanasia.org.au/>

I invite you to contact your State Representatives in both the Upper and Lower Houses:

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