

March 1, 2013

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Greetings in the name of the Good Shepherd, the God of all comfort.

I write to you with regard to a life and death issue.

You may be aware that the Premier, Lara Giddings, and the Leader of the Greens, Nick McKim plan to introduce to Tasmania a legal framework which will allow **Tasmanians to have their life ended by the administration of lethal medication.**

This practise has been called “active euthanasia”, “medical killing”, or “physician assisted suicide.” Ms. Giddings and Mr. McKim, acting as Private Members of the Parliament of Tasmania have released a consultation paper entitled “Voluntary Assisted Dying” and have invited comment.

Their proposal is of great concern.

It is premised on precarious notions of human life, of the nature of care and compassion, and of the role of government in society. Followers of Christ, Christian citizens, must respond to this danger.

The Anglican Church will be making a formal response to the Giddings-McKim paper in due course. **I would like to take this opportunity to offer my observations of what is proposed, and encourage you to communicate your own concerns and thoughts** to Ms Giddings and Mr. McKim as Members for Franklin, and also to your own local members.

The fact of illness, death and dying is something with which we all grapple.

Anglicans in Tasmania are well aware of the realities of human decline and death. This awareness comes from our own experience as human beings, as citizens involved in medical and related professions, and as those often privileged to engage with the hurting and bereaved through pastoral care and the exercise of Christian ministry.

By God's grace we pray to always be filled with compassion, care, deep encouragement and above all, hope. This is the example of Christ which guides us as we engage with this proposal.

There is no doubt that Ms. Giddings and Mr. McKim are genuinely moved by compassion. They seek to respond to suffering and the challenges of life and death from within their own personal set of values and philosophies.

Nevertheless, despite this sincerity, their proposal for Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) is destructive. **Ultimately, this proposal withdraws human dignity and belittles life.**

The question of euthanasia is a not a new one for Tasmanians. Euthanasia legislation was rejected by the Tasmanian Parliament as recently as 2009.

The definitive inquiry for the Tasmanian Context was made in 1998 by the *Community Development Committee* of the Tasmanian House of Assembly. This was a thorough inquiry and a balanced consideration. The findings were that voluntary euthanasia would be detrimental to Tasmanian society and should not be embraced.

The position of the Anglican Church was clearly communicated at this time. It remains unchanged:

“The Anglican Church is not opposed to allowing people to die when there is no possibility of that person recovering to live a meaningful life. Nor is the Church opposed to the administration of drugs for the relief of pain but which may also have the effect of

shortening life.”

“The Church is opposed to active euthanasia, that is, when other people decide to terminate a person's life either against the will of the person, without their consent or where a person has requested assistance to die.”

“Three basic theological themes underpin the church's concerns. The first is the Christian affirmation of the sanctity of life. Secondly the church affirms that all of life is connected or related and denies the radical individualism and autonomy which underlies much of the argument supporting active euthanasia. Thirdly a theological view of suffering has an important place in the discussion.”

*(Anglican Church of Australia, Diocese of Tasmania,  
Submission to the House of Assembly Community Development Committee Euthanasia Inquiry,  
June 1997, Pages 2 and 9)*

**The present consultation paper produced by Ms. Giddings and Mr. McKim is not a balanced consideration on a par with the 1998 inquiry.** It is a sincere but one-sided presentation of the pro-euthanasia argument.

Ms. Giddings and Mr. McKim have simply rehearsed many old arguments. They have presented very little new data or evidence. Their paper does not have the necessary neutrality, understanding of opposing arguments, or intellectual rigour, to seriously question the findings of the 1998 inquiry. It does not provide any reasonable argument for the removal of the existing prohibition on medical killing.

The burden of proof for this dangerous proposal lies with Ms. Giddings and Mr. McKim. Despite their own self-certainties about their view on this matter, this is not an obvious change that demands a good reason to halt it. Rather, it is a proposed change that would fracture some of our most important social values. It demands a justification that they simply cannot and do not provide.

With this letter I am providing some further observations I have made concerning the Giddings-McKim VAD consultation paper. I will also provide information and relevant links at a page on my blog: <http://imaginarydiocese.org/bishopjohn/euthanasia-resources>

I have also attached a brief paper to assist you if you would like to make your own feedback.

With every trust in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Author of Life, and the Author and Perfecter of our Faith, the God of all Comfort,

Rt. Rev'd John Harrower OAM  
Bishop of Tasmania