

Unconfirmed Minute from the 14th Synod Meeting of the Synod of Victoria and Tasmania

26 Response to Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Legislation

That the Synod resolved:

(a) To affirm that:

- (i) life is a gift of God, and all human life, regardless of circumstance, is precious to and has dignity before God;**
- (ii) neither death nor life, neither suffering nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord (see Romans 8:38-39);**
- (iii) as followers of Christ and through God's accompanying grace, fresh wisdom, peace and compassion can be birthed in the midst of suffering, which, without idolising suffering, is a deep and abiding mystery;**
- (iv) while death is the end of mortal life it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God (see *Uniting in Worship 2*; Funeral Liturgy);**
- (v) as followers of Christ we are called to spiritual discernment and responsibility as we journey through life and death; and**
- (vi) as the body of Christ we are called to be a loving and supportive community to people in need of care, including at the end of life.**

(b) To affirm that, in the light of (a) above, palliative care be the primary means through which end of life care is provided "for a person with an active, progressive, advanced disease, who has little or no prospect of cure and who is expected to die and for whom the primary goal is to optimise the quality of life." (see Palliative Care Australia: palliative care definition).

(c) To acknowledge that:

- (i) it is a legal right, as of 19 June 2019, for all Victorians who meet the eligibility criteria and follow the process described in the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 to access voluntary assisted dying; and**
- (ii) most people will find palliative care and end of life services give them the support they need at the end of their life (see DHHS Fact Sheet on Understanding voluntary assisted dying).**

(d) To recognise that within the Synod:

- (i) there is a range of faithful Christian responses to voluntary assisted dying which are consistent with the affirmations in clause (a); and**
- (ii) exploring, accessing, and conscientiously objecting to voluntary assisted dying are all within the range of faithful Christian responses to the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017.**

- (e) In the light of clauses (a), (b), (c) and (d) above, to give permission within Victoria to UCA institutions (Uniting VicTas and Uniting AgeWell) and the UCA-affiliated hospital group (Epworth HealthCare) to make voluntary assisted dying allowable within the context of their facilities and services for their patients, clients and residents, under the conditions described in the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017.
- (f) To request that the relevant UCA institutions (Uniting VicTas and Uniting AgeWell) and the UCA-affiliated hospital group (Epworth HealthCare) in Victoria ensure they develop and adopt clear policies and procedures that allow staff and volunteers to conscientiously object to participating in voluntary assisted dying, in accordance with the provisions outlined in the relevant legislation.
- (g) To commit to the provision of a compassionate pastoral response to all people, including those who choose to explore or access voluntary assisted dying within Victoria and their families, associated with the Church, UCA institutions (Uniting VicTas and Uniting AgeWell) and the UCA-affiliated hospital group (Epworth HealthCare).
- (h) To request equipping Leadership for Mission (eLM), in collaboration with the Synod Ethics Committee, to resource UCA ministers, lay leaders, chaplains, pastoral care workers and others who offer spiritual and pastoral support to people (and their families) who are exploring, accessing, or who have accessed voluntary assisted dying, including taking into account

 - i. engagement with First Peoples;
 - ii. diverse cultural and language needs;
 - iii. the range of faithful Christian responses; and
 - iv. the need for prayers and liturgical support for pastoral care and funerals, in consultation with the Assembly's Transforming Worship Panel.
- (i) To write to the Victorian Premier and relevant government ministers:

 - i. to call on the Victorian Government to increase resourcing for palliative care as the primary means through which end of life care is offered and delivered; and
 - ii. to encourage the Victorian Government to engage with First Peoples and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in resourcing the understanding of the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017.
- (j) To advise the Leader of the Opposition and shadow spokespeople of the action in (i) above.