



**PASTORAL LETTER ON ASSISTED SUICIDE**  
**31<sup>ST</sup> SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, 2<sup>ND</sup> AND 3<sup>RD</sup> NOVEMBER 2024**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

On Friday 29<sup>th</sup> November, the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill 2024-25 will be given its Second Reading in the House of Commons. The Bill, tabled by Kim Leadbeater MP, will as its long title states, “allow adults who are terminally ill, subject to safeguards and protections, to request and be provided with assistance to end their own life; and for connected purposes.”

Many of us have experienced the distress of seeing our loved ones endure some degree of pain or suffering when they have been mentally infirm, severely ill or dying. Our natural desire is to try and help alleviate that pain or suffering as quickly as possible. No one wishes those they care for to be in any kind of anguish, particularly when that person is nearing their death.

What the Bill before parliament will create is not the relief of that pain or suffering, but the legal right of someone who is terminally ill to intentionally commit suicide and to be assisted by others to do so. The justification for this is that a person’s life has been judged by themselves, or been judged by others, to be not worth living.

The better and more compassionate way to assist anyone facing the end of their life is to advocate excellent palliative care for all, so that our loved ones can be assured that their life will end with dignity and their pain be managed. Dame Cicely Saunders, considered one of the pioneers of palliative care, stated, “You don’t have to kill the patient in order to kill the pain”. She noted that most requests for assisted suicide recede once patients are given access to appropriate, whole-person care.

There have been strong and emotive arguments put for and against such legislative changes in the past. This Bill may appear to promote personal autonomy but cannot negate the fact that an act of assisted suicide is never autonomous in nature; it will always have an impact upon others, an individual’s family, their friends, and indeed the healthcare professionals who will be expected actively and deliberately to assist them in ending their life.

The Catholic Church affirms the intrinsic value and dignity of every human life from conception to natural death. Our faith teaches us that life is a sacred gift from God; that we are stewards, not owners, of our lives. This faith calls us to protect and care for the most vulnerable amongst us.

It is important to understand too, that our Catholic faith does not demand that life be prolonged at all costs. Death is part of our God-given life. The Catholic Church’s tradition affirms that a person does not have to accept treatment for a terminal illness when they judge that this will not be in their best interests. What is perhaps less widely known is that the Church also accepts that some medications which may have the likely effect of hastening death can be administered with the consent of a person or, if they are incapable of expressing a view, their next of kin, when this is done with the primary intention of alleviating their pain or suffering. This does not constitute ‘assisted suicide’ or euthanasia and needs no change to existing legislation.

We now know too, given the developments of such legal provisions in other countries, just how arbitrary and unreliable the eligibility ‘safeguards’ are in similar legislation where assisted suicide has been introduced. Its provision seems inevitably to have been extended beyond the limits given as the basis for its justification, to those with disabilities, those with mental illnesses, and in some jurisdictions even to children.

In this Sunday’s Gospel passage, we hear how Our Lord Jesus Christ united into a single precept the commandments ‘To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength’ and to ‘love your neighbour as yourself’. We demonstrate our love for God by cherishing the gift of life He has given to us. We demonstrate love for our neighbour by honouring and protecting the gift of life He has given to others.

I ask that the clergy, religious and lay faithful of our diocese unite in prayer and compassionate action to oppose the passage of this Bill and the legalisation of assisted suicide. This we should do out of a ‘concern for the good of every person in society, the protection of this good in law, and the spiritual and pastoral care of the sick and dying’<sup>i</sup>.

I urge you to consider writing to your MP to express your opposition or concerns about the Bill now before parliament (please see below<sup>ii</sup> the online resources which can help you to do this).

May the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God and Mother of Unfailing Help intercede for us and be the comforter of all those who suffer and all those afflicted in any way.

**✠ Marcus  
Bishop of Leeds**

*Given at Leeds on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, published through parish distribution systems, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Diocese on Saturday 2<sup>nd</sup>/Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2024.*

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<sup>i</sup> Quote from the summary of the written evidence given by the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales to the Health and Social Care Select Committee inquiry.

<sup>ii</sup> The Catholic Bishops’ Conference of England and Wales website has been updated with a range of resources to help to be informed regarding the assisted suicide legislation that is currently working its way through Parliament: <https://www.cbcew.org.uk/opposing-assisted-suicide/> and <https://www.dioceseofleeds.org.uk/catholics-oppose-assisted-suicide/>

The charity *Right to Life UK* has a simple online mechanism to help you contact your MP. It takes little more than a few minutes to input your postcode, make sure the suggested text suits your viewpoint and submit your message to ask your MP to stop assisted suicide being rushed into law. Go to the *Right to Life UK* website: <https://righttolife.org.uk/ASthreat>