

## Item 6 – COUNCIL FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

### General Assembly 2024 – Supplementary Report (Thursday afternoon)

#### ASSISTED SUICIDE AND EUTHANASIA TASK GROUP

1. Since the 2024 Reports went to print, society moves further to remove the fundamental understanding of the innate dignity and sanctity of human life. This is due to (in respect of our current Western culture) the continued growth of fundamentalist materialism, the rise of relative morality (with the loss of absolute morality) and radical individual autonomy.
2. This Supplementary Report of the Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia (AS/E) Task Group wishes to engage both the whole Christian Church and all of our society in affirming the importance and innate dignity of every human life from conception to death as a precious gift from God. We propose this has to be done both internally within our congregations and externally to wider society.
3. We recognise the clear moral distinction between assisting the dying person through end-of-life care/palliative care and actively and intentionally assisting their suicide or terminating their life. Legal approval of assisted suicide (intentionally assisting another person to commit suicide) and/or euthanasia (the active, intentional termination of a patient's life) would cross a clear line in morality, legal and medical ethics. This would be a radical step, not seen since capital punishment was made illegal; that the state could facilitate death upon its citizens.
4. God looks on human life as very valuable and sacred.<sup>1</sup> Human life is beautifully and infinitely valuable because we are made in God's image, elevated over everything else. Thus, because each person's life has an inherent and equal value, beyond our comprehension and not conditional on capacity or productivity, we would clearly advocate opposition to any change in the law that would judge a person's life to be worth more or less than anyone else's. Therefore, irrespective of ill-health, dementia, disability, mental health, terminal diagnosis or any other attribute or circumstance a person finds themselves in, that person's innate value and dignity does not change in the sight of God.
5. The answers to questions 67, 68 & 69 of The Shorter Catechism dealing with the Sixth Commandment explain very clearly that Christians ought to take every care of our own lives and the lives of others as they are valued by God, and forbids the unjust taking of life. Any move to legislate for AS/E undermines this key biblical truth of God's love for all.<sup>2</sup> The fractured and broken world in which we are assigned responsible stewardship requires us to proclaim this timeless truth, and love all people irrespective of social cost and cultural ideas and trends.
6. The conversation in this area, which for many is linked to the relief of suffering, needs to be informed, nuanced and compassionate without compromising upon ultimate truth. We affirm that we should never seek to claim God's control over death to self-solve the

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 139 & 1 Samuel 2 v 6

<sup>2</sup> [The Shorter Catechism](#)

mystery of suffering. Our solution to suffering is a call to love, reflecting the love of Jesus to the suffering of body and mind during his earthly ministry. '[Love] always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres...' <sup>3</sup>, manifested in excellent social care, healthcare and palliative care. The Bible teaches uniquely that God Himself, in the person of Jesus Christ, experienced suffering. We believe in a God who knows what suffering feels like and is well able to walk alongside us and help us in our times of suffering. God is called "...the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ." <sup>4</sup> Where personal autonomy and individual choice often drive the debate, we should remember that we were created for dependence, not self-sufficiency.

7. We should never lose hope and trust in God's plan despite what we see in our world. This mystery is further outlined in Ecclesiastes 3:11 "He (God) has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end." We can trust that God the Creator upholds and sustains all things, and His holy, wise, and perfect providence is working for our good and His glory. This is our comfort and confidence in our troubles and sufferings, and our steadfast hope as we face death and look forward to life everlasting.

## 8. Current situation

The current situation is stark, and legislative changes in one or other of the jurisdictions on these islands seems likely. We have outlined the current areas of the British Isles with AS/E legislation in the order of current progress:

- a) Jersey as a crown dependency has voted in favour on the 22/5/24 for legislation of 'track 1' (that is terminal illness), to be enacted in 18 months' time, making Jersey the first to legalise; for both Euthanasia and assisted suicide. <sup>5</sup>
- b) Isle of Man have voted in principle and legislation is moving forward; for both euthanasia and assisted suicide. <sup>6</sup>
- c) The McArthur Bill in Scotland is being debated in Holyrood in Autumn; <sup>7</sup> This is for both Euthanasia and Assisted suicide.
- d) In the Republic of Ireland, at the time of writing there is no Bill, however, as noted in the CPA Annual report the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Assisted Dying has recommended a change in the law for both Euthanasia and Assisted suicide. There was also a minority report saying the opposite. <sup>8</sup>
- e) In Westminster there is no current bill and the Health and Social Care Committee inquiry on assisted dying/assisted suicide remained neutral on the issue and the government response stated that they did not plan to establish a national strategy for

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 13 v 7 (NIV)

<sup>4</sup> 2 Corinthians 1 v 3-5 (NIV)

<sup>5</sup> [Assisted Dying in Jersey](#)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.iomtoday.co.im/news/assisted-dying-bill-we-speak-to-both-sides-outside-tynewald-ahead-of-further-debate-688266>

<sup>7</sup> [Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults \(Scotland\) Bill](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Committee on Assisted Dying](#)

death literacy.<sup>9</sup> However, it should be noted that both Keir Starmer and Rishi Sunak have said they will provide a free vote with parliamentary time post general election on the 4<sup>th</sup> July.

## 9. Aims of group

In terms of contextualising the work of the task group ahead, there are five aspects.

- a) To speak to and mobilise the members and congregations of the Presbyterian Church to affirm the importance of life and of reducing suffering and distress, and never put the two in opposition. To affirm the Godly principle that killing the sufferer is not synonymous with removing suffering.
- b) To advocate and provide concrete ways in which we, as people of Christian faith, can help support those in need across our communities which are practical and relevant in the context of the AS/E debate.
- c) To speak into the public square and demonstrate how Christian values are concordant with a compassionate, sensible, dignified and civilised society in which we value and protect each other.
- d) To highlight a real concern arising from the experience of law change in other jurisdictions of a trend in which this ‘choice’ becomes a suggestion and then becomes an expectation fundamentally changing the value of a human life. The option transitions to an obligation.
- e) To speak into the public square in the event of law change within Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland or a parallel jurisdiction, to strive to ensure that there are safe spaces away from pressure, suggestion and expectation to end one’s life prematurely. To always affirm a person’s value and innate dignity in the sight of God irrespective of any law change or belief.

10. Going forward it is the aim of the CPA through its AS/E TG in partnership with other relevant General Assembly Councils and bodies to develop more specific resources in relation to helping the Church affirm these principles in the face of any potential legislation which brings these principles into question. This will have two aspects: -

- i. Inward facing supports to help the church engage with the issues, develop deeper understanding, and promote engagement with law makers.
- ii. Outer facing resource production and a specially equipped team to pre-emptively engage in strategic public discourse and media engagement.

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<sup>9</sup> See [House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 'Assisted Dying/Assisted Suicide' \(20 February 2024\)](#) and [House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee, 'Assisted Dying/Assisted suicide: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report' \(8th May 2024\)](#) Recommendation 5, page 7