



Diocese of Port Pirie Chancery

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Pastoral Letter to the Christian Faithful of the Diocese of Port Pirie

Concerning the SA Parliament's Vote on Euthanasia

Dear Sisters & Brothers

It was a relief to read the Euthanasia Bill did not proceed to law through the South Australian Parliament. There was good will and good conscience on both sides, but I thank those parliamentarians who spoke so well, despite the campaign of celebrities, to ensure the Bill did not pass.

No one wants people to die in pain, especially those who like myself have seen a beloved sister die of bone cancer and a younger brother die of encephalitis over six terrible weeks, and that is why the Church is so largely involved in palliative care and Homes for the Aged, where there is such devoted attention for the frail. And the Church does not prohibit pain relief, even if a side effect is the shortening of life for the grievously ill. Better palliative care, not euthanasia, is a proper response.

The English novelist Sara Maitland puts it well when she writes "Pain and fear undermine sound judgement and can lead to confusion and depression".

It would have been a dark day had Parliament authorised euthanasia. It is a dark universe when Parliament permit doctors and nurses to change from being ministers of healing to agents of death. I cannot imagine how doctors and nurses who perpetrate an abortion must feel afterwards, but it must do damage to their sense of vocation as ministers of healing.

It would be the same with euthanasia. We also know from our South Australian experience with abortion that earlier precautions and safeguards were all gradually whittled away, to the point that abortion is now performed on demand. In Belgium and the Netherlands, formerly such Catholic countries, despite early restrictions euthanasia is now being arranged for young people and in Belgium for the mentally ill. Who next?

So how do we as a Catholic community react to politicians who voted for euthanasia? With courtesy and charity. We live in a democracy. Whether we should give them places of honour in our fiestas and cultural celebrations when we invite them is another question. Such events celebrate life, not death.

I thank all those medical and professional staff and carers who do so much to care for the ill & frail.

Yours in Christ

+ Gregory O'Kelly SJ
Bishop of the Diocese of Port Pirie

18th November 2016