



CATHOLIC ARCHDIOCESE
OF MELBOURNE



CATHOLIC
DIOCESE
of
BALLARAT



MY LORD MY GOD



A Pastoral Letter to the Catholics of Victoria on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ,

In the next few weeks, the Victorian Parliament will be asked to debate a Bill that would further weaken protections for vulnerable patients and reduce protections for medical practitioners who conscientiously object to euthanasia and assisted suicide.

We are writing today to ask you to contact your local Members of Parliament and urge them to vote against this Bill.

As the late Pope Francis reminded us, *“euthanasia is often presented falsely as a form of compassion. Yet ‘compassion’ ... does not involve the intentional ending of a life, but rather the willingness to share the burdens of those facing the end stages of our earthly pilgrimage.”*¹

The Government’s Bill seeks to remove many of the limited protections offered by Victoria’s so-called ‘voluntary assisted dying’ (VAD) laws. The changes would, for the first time, allow medical practitioners to raise euthanasia and assisted suicide with patients who have never asked about it – patients who may be at their most vulnerable. The changes would also force medical practitioners who conscientiously object to euthanasia and assisted suicide to provide patients with information about euthanasia and assisted suicide – as determined by the Government.

As Pope Francis explained, *“our religious convictions offer a more profound understanding of illness, suffering and death, seeing these as part of the mystery of divine providence and, for the Christian tradition, a means towards sanctification. At the same time, the compassionate actions and respect shown by dedicated medical personnel and caregivers have often created the possibility for those at the end of their lives to find spiritual comfort, hope and reconciliation with God, family members and friends.”*²

As Catholics, we stand united in this conviction with many people of good will from other Christian communities and from other religions. Earlier this year, a group of religious leaders from Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh communities united in calling on the Victorian Government to abandon its proposed changes to VAD laws. As the leaders made clear, “we do not believe euthanasia or assisted suicide can ever be made safe – since they involve acts that are unsafe in their very essence.”

Instead of attempting to expand euthanasia and assisted suicide, we urge Members of Parliament to continue expanding access to good palliative care to all Victorians, particularly for those in the regions.

¹ Holy See, *Message of the Holy Father to the participants in the Symposium “Towards a Narrative of Hope: an International Interfaith Symposium on Palliative Care”*, 22 May 2024, press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2024/05/22/240522a.html
² Ibid

Palliative care provides holistic care to people living with terminal illness or who are close to death. It maximises comfort and support, seeking to address psychological, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual needs as well as attending to distress and relieving pain. We are fortunate to have high-quality palliative care in Australia, with testimony from palliative care physicians making clear that it is extremely rare for pain to be unrelievable in this day and age.

The late Pope also offered particular words of encouragement that we repeat today to those dedicated nurses, doctors, carers and other health professionals who support patients at the end of their lives, *“your service is important – I would even say essential – in helping the sick and dying realize that they are not isolated or alone, that their lives are not a burden, but that they always remain inherently valuable in the eyes of God (cf. Psalm 116:15) and united to us by the bonds of communion.”*³

³ Ibid

You can find your local state parliamentarians here: <https://findelectorate.parliament.vic.gov.au>

The Australian Bishops have published a document to guide priests, chaplains and pastoral workers who are asked to provide pastoral support to Catholics who are considering euthanasia, *To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope*. You can find a copy of this document here: www.bit.ly/WitnessandAccompany

A copy of the joint letter and submission by faith leaders to Victorian parliamentarians can be found here: www.bit.ly/EuthanasiaBill. It provides further information about the changes canvassed by the Government.

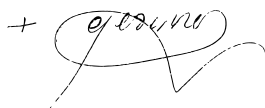
Yours sincerely in Christ,



His Eminence Mykola Cardinal Bychok CSsR
Eparch, Eparchy of Saints Peter and Paul of Melbourne for
Ukrainian Catholics in Australia, New Zealand and Oceania



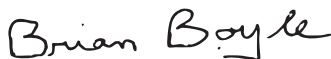
Most Reverend Peter A Comensoli DD
Archbishop, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne



Most Reverend Greg Bennet DD
Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Sale



Most Reverend Paul Bird CSsR DD
Bishop, Catholic Diocese of Ballarat



Reverend Dr Brian Boyle
Administrator, Catholic Diocese of Sandhurst



Most Reverend John Panamthottathil CMI
Eparch, Syro-Malabar Eparchy of St Thomas the Apostle,
Melbourne