

# Remaining in **lament and hope**

A pastoral response  
for a Voluntary Assisted  
Dying pathway







# Remaining in **lament and hope**

## A pastoral response for a Voluntary Assisted Dying pathway

This pastoral resource has been put together by a team of UnitingCare Queensland and Queensland Synod Chaplains for ministry agents across the Synod. It is intended to inform and support them in the context of providing pastoral care for people who may be considering, or who have chosen, a voluntary assisted dying pathway.



The Uniting Church in Australia  
**QUEENSLAND SYNOD**



**UnitingCare**



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# Foreword

**Queensland's Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation changes have brought some concerns and confusion, especially for those who provide pastoral care for people in this significantly vulnerable time of life.**

As a church we believe in the God given dignity and worth of every human life and we believe that all people, at every stage of life, can experience 'life in all its fullness'. We believe that although end of life can be challenging and distressing it can also be a time of powerful hope and renewal. We are committed to provision of high quality and accessible palliative care which honours and respects the individual and is responsive to the pastoral and spiritual needs of the people we serve.

We also recognise that there will be people, who in good conscience make a decision to undertake voluntary assisted dying. We are called to offer appropriate and compassionate support to them as they contemplate that most fundamental of human concerns, death. I commend this resource to you as you seek to do just that.

Thank you to all those who have contributed to the production of this tool to help you navigate the complex legislation and offer some ideas, inspiration, and guidance.

I pray for you and with you, as you bring the compassionate love of Christ to people each day.

God bless.

*Andrew*

**Andrew Gunton**  
Moderator



The Uniting Church in Australia  
**QUEENSLAND SYNOD**

# A pastoral response for a Voluntary Assisted Dying pathway

... and the leaves of the tree are  
for the healing of the nations.

*Revelation 22:2*

## Preamble

We acknowledge that we live and work in the greater context of First and Second peoples, and that our cultural awareness and sensitivities are to be inclusive of all peoples. Within this awareness and these sensitivities are traditions, stories, sufferings and ways to be honoured.

Access now to Voluntary Assisted Dying poses its own particular issues, challenges and contexts into which we may be invited or placed.

*“The experience of pain, suffering and the end-of-life is a vulnerable experience. We are called to participate in and witness to God’s mission of compassionate care of the sick, dying, the poor in spirit, those who are experiencing brokenness and forsakenness.”*

**Final Report Voluntary Assisted Dying Queensland Synod 2019**

When Jesus uttered those words,

*“Father, into your hands  
I commend my spirit,”*

he did so having endured great suffering; the excruciating pain of crucifixion, the agony of Gethsemane and an anguish that reached deeply beyond mere physicality. This was the final of those seven Words that Jesus offered from the Cross. It is the word of reconciliation.

The seven Words of Jesus are used to structure this resource. They will be our companion for this resource. These words are: Grace, Mercy, Community, Abandonment, Love, Legacy and Reconcile. We pray they may shape and offer direction when we are seeking for a way to go.

Within these seven words are the words we will need for a pastoral companioning with those who are considering, or who have decided to action Voluntary Assisted Dying. Along this pathway there will be losses and griefs, laments and hope. These will be experienced variously by all those involved as we remain in lament and hope.

With these Words is the beginning and the end; the beginning is always forgiveness, and the end is always to die with dignity and to reconcile.

From its beginning to end, the dying and the death of Jesus was one of self awareness, self determination, and grace toward a final sacred sigh.

We enter into the midst of all that would strip one of dignity, that would bring torturous pain, that would be offensive and unbearable for the loved ones who look on; to come to the place of desiring one's own death, requesting one's own death and, or permitting one's own death.

Importantly, the focus of this resource is about the companioning, not the decision.

The decision belongs to the person whose journey we may companion.

These words are offered as a pastoral resource for companions in order that we may not stray into coercive or prejudicial comments, that we might maintain healthy personal and professional attentiveness and recognise and honour persons' vulnerabilities, including our own.

It will be important to recognise those for whom the conversation is difficult or challenging and those for whom their resolve is clear.

*The decision belongs to  
the person whose journey  
we may companion.*



“Even just calling them challenging conversations, difficult conversations, you feel yourself bracing, you're kind of getting your armour on, you're going to do this tough thing ... actually, I think perhaps the thing we need to do is take our armour off and say, the reason that this is feeling sensitive to me is because actually there is tenderness involved, there is pain possibly involved ... and I'm prepared to be in that painful place with that person. So instead of calling them challenging conversations, I'm calling them tender conversations, because I think it changes the attitude we take into it.”

**From “How to have 'difficult' conversations,” Palliative Care Specialist  
Dr Kathryn Mannix**

## **Before the first word**

**With the complexity and variety of positions and opinions, the legal obligations placed upon providers, facilities, agencies and institutions and the option for conscientious objection, there is a decision to be made by you as Ministry Agents as to the extent of your involvement or otherwise.**

Whatever your decision, it is hoped that this resource will provide pastoral companionship and be an incentive for love and self care. We have intentionally chosen “companionship” to describe a way of being with. Companionship suggests movement, commitment, trust, together.



As Ministry Agents and pastoral companions, we carry within us opinions, understandings, positions and maybe reticence. Being aware of these things will help us to be more fully present and attentive to the other.

The legislation requires that we must not initiate discussion about VAD or suggest VAD to a person.

This does not mean that every subsequent discussion about VAD must be initiated by the person. Once initiated a pastoral conversation may continue and remain focused on the spiritual and existential laments and hopes, particular as they may be for each person.

#### **Refer to Legislation Summary in this Resource**

The moral and theological discussion around the issues of compassionate presence, proximity and complicity with VAD has raised contentious and provocative conclusions.

The *Parable of the Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:2-37) shows what a companioning relationship with the suffering neighbour looks like:

- **the qualities to be avoided**—indifference, apathy, bias, fear of getting one's hands dirty, being totally occupied with one's own affairs;
- **the qualities to be embraced**—attention, listening, understanding, compassion, and discretion.

# Reflection

## Presence as moral action

We realise that VAD will evoke strong reactions. Companioning can be perceived as complicity by some or compassionate presence by others.

One's presence could be seen to bring the accusation of complicity and scandal to the church. Alternatively, one's absence could be construed as a dispassionate abandonment of a person in the time of a person's most poignant need. We may consider, which would be the greater scandal?

Therefore, no one is to be abandoned. Rather, to accompany and hold the hand of the dying, is a greater obligation to which we are committed, no matter what situation the person may be in.

We are witness to the love of God, the one who has been revealed in Jesus Christ, who lived, suffered, died and was raised to life.

*“We love because, God first loved us.”*

### **1 John 1:4**

Therefore what can I say, If God is for us who can be against us. There is nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus.

### **Romans 8:31**

# Voluntary Assisted Dying theological perspective

Uniting Church,  
Queensland Synod Position

**The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod seeks to witness to the God given dignity and worth of every human life.**

We are committed to 'All that Jesus began to do and teach' (Acts 1:1) by working towards a society characterised by love, compassion, justice, inclusion and reconciliation so that all people, at every stage of life, can experience 'life in all its fullness' (John 10:10). We seek to witness to God's good gift of creation and the intrinsic worth and dignity of all people in every circumstance that is grounded in a reality that is untouched by the circumstances of our lives or death.

In our compassionate care we seek to remain with people, in both lament and hope, bearing witness to God being with us in every circumstance of life. In recognition of this, we are opposed to the legalisation of voluntary assisted dying in Queensland. Our facilities will not provide this as a service and our staff will not participate in medical acts to end a life through voluntary assisted dying.

We recognise that in some situations, the experiences of end-of-life can cause significant distress for the person dying, their families and care staff. While we do not support voluntary assisted dying, the Church is committed to offering a compassionate and pastoral response to people and families who choose this path.

We also recognise that there will be people, who in good conscience and in light of their faith in God, make a decision to undertake voluntary assisted dying. A compassionate and pastoral response includes accompanying people and families who choose, and access voluntary assisted dying. This is best done by connecting them to emotional, psychological and social support, spiritual and pastoral care, and minimising physical suffering. This response does not include medically participating in acts intended to end life through a voluntary assisted dying process.

*In our compassionate care we  
seek to remain with people.*

# Theological considerations

How should we engage with people who are considering or in the process for VAD? What should our pastoral response be? Can we accompany people who are in the process of VAD while maintaining a theological position opposed to VAD? These are complicated issues and the below theological reflection is developed to assist you in your ongoing reflection and engagement in pastoral ministry as you reflect on how to respond to a VAD related pastoral situation.

## Our basis

In discussing the theological issues associated with VAD, our starting point is who we are as the Church. 'The Uniting Church acknowledges that the faith and unity of the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church are built upon the one Lord Jesus Christ. The Church preaches Christ the risen crucified One and confesses him as Lord to the glory of God the Father. In Jesus Christ "God was reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). In love for the world, God gave the Son to take away the world's sin' (Basis of Union, Paragraph 3). The God we confess as divine community of Father, Son and Holy Spirit is the basis for our life as the Christian community. This gives shape to our theological account of creation and what it means to be human, to live fully including how we suffer and die.

## Our mission

The experience of pain, suffering and the end-of-life is a vulnerable experience. In our pastoral support of people, we are called to participate in and witness to God's mission of compassionate care of the sick, dying, the poor in spirit, those who are experiencing brokenness and forsakenness. With this Christian understanding of our humanity, people should not feel as if they are a 'burden' to others or to the broader society at any stage of life, but especially at the end-of-life. Any such feelings of being a burden to others, especially at the end of life, distort the voluntary decision making of vulnerable people. Providing compassionate service to people who are aged, sick, suffering and vulnerable is a great gift and privilege. Valuing and promoting the compassionate service and love of the most vulnerable in society is a key foundation for a flourishing society, according to the Christian vision of society.

## Our witness

What are we witnessing to as we pastorally accompany people who are considering or in the VAD pathway? Our pastoral accompanying is an opportunity to bear witness to the Gospel as we find our identity in Christ by following his mission into the world. Ultimately we seek to witness to the good news of 'God with us' in every circumstance of our human existence. In our engagement with VAD, we recognise that God's living presence, in Jesus Christ through the Spirit, is the primary source of our hope, strength and power. God's grace is sufficient for us, with the power of God made known in our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:9).

## Sanctity of life

For Christians, life has its origin in the gift of God and we are called to live in a way that reflects the nature of this gift. Put simply, this worth of each person is not dependent on our life circumstances, but is by virtue of our value before God and because we are loved and known by God. Christianity is a life-affirming faith meaning that all life has dignity, worth and value (Matthew 6:25-34). There is no person that is not loved by God and God's creation (Colossians 1: 16). Upholding the sanctity of life recognises that life itself is a gift from the Creator (Genesis 2:7). It is grounded in an understanding that God's creation is 'good' and that 'God so loved the world' that he gave his only Son (John 3:16). The Church is called to witness to the gift of God's creation, at every stage of life, in every circumstance of life. This is especially so in our work alongside the most vulnerable and fragile circumstances of human existence. A Christian vision of society includes that the value of every person is upheld, respected, promoted and not diminished in any way as God's creation.

*Life has its origin  
in the gift of God.*

## Lament and hope: pastorally accompany people

Suffering and death is a human reality. It is critical that we do not devalue a human life as not worth living because of external circumstances. An understanding of compassion as solely concerned with the relief of suffering is premised on the utilitarian pursuit of optimal happiness. Whereas a Christian account of compassion is more comprehensive than the absence of pain and suffering in the present. It includes hope in eternal life, love and service of others, a belief that God will sustain us in the middle of difficult life circumstances and a vision for a flourishing society in which all people experience 'life in all its fullness'.

It is important to acknowledge that there are circumstances in which we can understand the cry to 'end life' and to 'end this suffering'. We are called to accompany people compassionately in these circumstances and to relieve suffering as far as possible. Why am I suffering? Where is God in our suffering? These are profound questions for those who are in the midst of pain and suffering. We must avoid neat and simple answers to questions like these. Moreover, these should not be dismissed by us and we should not judge this cry of lament.

We empathise with these deep cries out of the depth of suffering. Jesus, in the passion narratives, is deeply aware of the suffering ahead of him, and cries out to God to 'remove this cup from me', and for the strength of God to continue. This cry is followed by a commitment to follow God's will in his life (Luke 22: 42).

Our prayer is that God may sustain us in our dying, and that we may witness to the dignity, worth and value of every person, in every circumstance and in every stage of life. Our call is to remain with people in compassionate care throughout their suffering and dying, bearing witness to the presence of God with us.

There are times to lament this suffering and to groan about the fragility of creation (Romans 8: 18-25). Jesus cried out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me” (Matthew 27: 46). The Psalmist cries out “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I bear pain in my soul, and have sorrow in my heart all day long?” (Psalm 13: 1-3). We accompany the suffering in lament, but the flame of hope is never fully extinguished even in death. The Psalmist goes on, “But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me” (Psalm 13: 5-6). Lament is not the abandonment of faith, but is the deepest cry of hope in the midst of despair.


Compassionate care of a person on a Voluntary Assisted Dying pathway is remaining with people, in both lament and hope. It is bearing witness, as fragile clay jars (2 Corinthians 4: 7-12), to the hope that the light of God shines in the darkness, and darkness cannot overcome it. It is witnessing to the Christian hope that there is no human situation, pain or suffering that is beyond the reach of the love of God. It is witnessing to the resurrection and new life that emerges out of the deepest experiences of suffering, hopelessness and despair. In our experience of pain and suffering, we have the hope of God’s abiding and sustaining presence. Nothing can separate us from the love of God.

It is suitable that the final words of this theological reflection are from Romans 8. We hold fast to this hope as fragile clay jars, and pray that our life as the Christian community, in our agencies and in our congregations, may bear witness to this hope.

*‘Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.’*

**Romans 8: 35-39**

**Rev. Dr. Adam McIntosh**



*Nothing can separate  
us from the love of God.*

# Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation

## What is Voluntary Assisted Dying?

**Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD)** gives people who are suffering and dying, and who meet the eligibility criteria, the option of requesting medical assistance to end their lives.

This is different from other end of life processes such as the withdrawal of treatment by withholding or withdrawing overly burdensome medical treatment from a person because of medical futility or non-beneficial care; and relieving suffering through palliative care interventions that may unintentionally hasten a person's death. In Queensland, voluntary assisted dying is governed by the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021.

**Voluntary:** Consent, free from coercion, capacity

**Assisted:** Access to substance to legally end life, and practitioner administration

**Dying:** Intention is to end the life of the person

# Eligibility criteria

**There are five eligibility criteria for people who wish to access VAD in Queensland.**

A person must:

1. Have an eligible condition;
2. Have decision making capacity;
3. Be acting voluntarily and without coercion;
4. Be at least 18 years of age; and
5. Fulfil residency requirements.

An eligible condition:

- is advanced, progressive and will cause death, and
- is expected to cause death within 12 months, and
- Is causing suffering that the person considers intolerable.

Determination of eligibility is the role of a trained medical practitioner.

# Your obligations

**You may offer pastoral care or be in ministry in a variety of services some faith based and others public.**

Wherever you are, you must not:

- hinder a person's access to VAD information;
- dismiss requests for information about VAD on the basis of a belief that a person is ineligible;
- state or imply that a person who has requested information about, or who wishes to access, VAD must leave a service in order to access a VAD related process.



# Can we talk about Voluntary Assisted Dying?

**Any person involved in delivering care, including pastoral care, must not *initiate* discussion about VAD or *suggest* VAD to a resident, patient, clients, their family members or friends.**

This does not mean that every subsequent discussion about VAD must be initiated by the person. It is permissible to discuss VAD but not to suggest or initiate a discussion about VAD.

## Conscientious objection

**If you are employed by an agency of the Synod, or a chaplain in a public hospital, then you may conscientiously object to:**

- providing information about VAD;
- assisting a health practitioner in the request and assessment process; and/or
- being present at the time of the administration of VAD substance.

If a conscientious objector is asked by a person for information about VAD, they should request the person initiate the VAD inquiry with another staff member (who may be identified).

Offering excellence in pastoral care to a person is not considered part of a conscientious objection. For instance, if a person has made an administration decision or request to access VAD and continues under the care of a facility, this is not a reason to conscientiously object to ongoing care and support of the person.

# Pastoral conversation about Voluntary Assisted Dying

**It is an offense under the Act for a person to dishonestly, or by coercion, induce another person to make, or revoke, a request for access to VAD.**

It is very important to be aware of the power dynamics of a pastoral relationship in any conversations about VAD. Power is inherent in all pastoral roles and shall not be used in a manner which is abusive, coercive or unprofessional.

All spiritual and pastoral conversations with a person who is considering, or has decided to undertake VAD, are to be conducted in accordance with the professional standards of the Code of Ethics and Ministry Practice. In the pastoral relationship a ministry agent seeks to express an ethic of care, which includes nurturing the other person's power over their own life as they relate to others and to God.

## Confidentiality

**Deciding whether to access VAD is a sensitive, personal end of life choice for a person.**

Privacy and confidentiality of the person are paramount considerations. It is important for you to be aware of your organisation policy and procedures regarding recording of any information related to a voluntary assisted dying process.

As with other sensitive information in a healthcare context, Chaplain's involved in the care of a person considering or accessing VAD must only share the person's personal information as necessary with members of the care team. Again, it is important to be aware of the processes and procedures for your organisation.

# Voluntary Assisted Dying stages

**There are various stages in the process of VAD.  
A person may choose to pause or cease progression  
through these stages at any point.**

These stages are:

- First Request
- First Assessment
- Consulting Assessment
- Second Request
- Final Request
- Final Review
- Administration Decision
- Administration of the VAD substance

Eligible, trained, and verified health practitioners are appointed to Co-ordinating, Consulting and Administering Practitioner roles.

*Nurture the other person's power  
over their own life as they relate  
to others and to God.*



# Pastoral **response**



# Grace

The companion for Grace is forgive,  
which is healing presence

And the Word became flesh and lived among  
us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of  
a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

*John 1:14*

A human experience on the way toward VAD

## The first word: grace/forgive

God is our first and constant companion. In that Spirit we seek an open forgiving space for people considering VAD. Even if a person's decision is clear to them, it may still raise issues and thoughts not yet known or not yet expressed.

“Grace is the experience of finally, gratefully, relaxing the contraction of fearful separation and opening to the Spirit as our own radiant splendour: knowing it, feeling it, entering it, as it enters us.”

**P 111, The Grace in Dying A Message of Hope, Comfort and Spiritual Transformation** | Kathleen Dowling Singh

*“Behold, the home of God is among mortals. God will dwell with them as their God; they will be God's peoples, and God will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.”*

*And the one who was seated on the throne said, “See, I am making all things new.”*

**Revelation 21:3-5**

We remember Jesus' first dying word to us:

*Father, forgive them, for  
they know not what they do.*

In this word is the beginning of open and tender communication. As you meet people wanting to explore or access VAD you will be meeting people who may have pondered these thoughts long before they could express them and, maybe people already bearing echoes of judgement. Before they can speak there will need to be a gesture toward a safe place. In that place there is no judgement, only acknowledgement of mystery and yearning hope, and the extending of forgiving grace in Christ witnessing that God's grace is sufficient.



## In the beginning— forgiveness first

In remembering that it is God who is our constant companion in every journey we make, we affirm that the fabric of all existence is immersed in this forgiving grace from beginning to end.

Forgiveness as grace precedes all things, even if we do not know it.

It was forgiveness that preceded betrayal, even the betrayal by Judas.

It was forgiveness that preceded abandonment, even the abandonment of Jesus by the disciples, and all who were there that dark, disturbing day.

Forgiveness, when it touches one's deepest longing, is that graced cushioned space that permits and absorbs tension, vulnerability, and differing opinion safely, where fearful and secret thoughts may be expressed and heard.

Forgiveness is love for what may be painful and difficult, that some may find morally disturbing. This unconditional presence of forgiveness witnesses to the comforting hope of the Gospel.

May we always remember, that who “they” are, always includes us.

*Forgiveness as grace precedes all  
things, even if we do not know it.*

## Sacred reading

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends.

### **Selected verses from 1 Corinthians 13**

Lord, will you ever remember me,  
Why keep turning away from me?  
Must I carry this grief for ever,  
How long endure this pain?

My God, look at me, see me, answer me,  
Shine on me or I will die;  
Never let my enemy boast,  
“See how you fall! I have won!”

I trust in your love  
And rejoice, for you save me;  
I will sing to the Lord  
Who treats me with kindness.

### **Psalms 13:1-6**





## Reflection

**“May God forgive me.” “Is it wrong to want to die?”  
“Will my family understand?” “What do you think?”**

These, and many other questions may come our way.  
Perhaps before the questions, ask to hear their story.

On hearing a request for Voluntary Assisted Dying for the first time, consider the personal, moral, and pastoral issues it raises for you.

How might your faith and your conscience constrain or enable you?

How might these inform and shape your pastoral response?

In love, is the abiding essence in forgiveness, grace, and kindness.

How might they be your name as pastoral companions in VAD?

## Practice

**Tender listening** (without agenda, without prejudice)

**The only and best “power” that God has is the attractiveness of loving kindness that draws one freely with the offer of healing.**

To be truly effective, however, presence needs to be more than just being there—as the story of Job’s friends makes clear. Presence must involve being there with compassion—the willingness and the freedom to enter into the suffering of the other, even when we cannot fix it or *even when we do not agree*.

This means we must have the capacity to listen and to hear as the other expresses anguish, confusion, anger, or pain, without attempting to counteract, persuade, or fix in such a way as to make the anger go away. Sometimes a word can erase anguish, as in the case of a word of pardon or of love, but when it comes to physical pain or anguish, this is not usually true.

**p.36, The Art of Listening** | The Compassionate Visitor

The state of one's heart inevitably shapes one's life; it is ultimately the place where everything is decided. It will be the place from which our responses will emerge, "Where your treasure is, there is your heart also."

*A compassionate heart need never carry the burden of judgement*

*A forgiving heart knows the art of freedom*

*A loving heart awakens the spirit to possibility and engagement with others.*

**John O'Donohue, Benedictus p 121** | States of Heart

**Consider:**

Where is my heart in this space?

What are you feeling in this moment?

Listen to your own words, what they be sounding like?

*"Where your treasure is,  
there is your heart also."*

# Prayer

Prayer may also be a Blessing or a Benediction.  
We are reminded that we do not know how to pray as we ought.  
Even a sigh or groan will be heard.

## **Romans 8:26-27**

May all that is unforgiven in you  
be released  
May your fears yield  
their deepest tranquilities.  
May all that is unlived in you  
blossom into a future  
grace with love.

## **“To Come Home to Yourself” Benedictus | John O’Donohue**

Today and tomorrow  
I am always at your side  
Jesus said:  
I am with you  
In your smiles and your sorrow  
I am always at your side  
Jesus said:  
I am with you  
Until the world is over  
I am always at your side

## **Ruth Burgess**

Jesus said, “Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

## **Matthew 11:28-30**

# Mercy

## Always mercy before confession

"Behold the gates of mercy  
In arbitrary space  
And none of us deserving  
Of cruelty or the grace  
O, solitude of longing  
Where love has been confined  
Come healing of the body  
Come healing of the mind."

*Leonard Cohen*

**"Come Healing"**

A human experience on the way toward VAD

## **The second word: mercy as kindness and compassion**

### **Invitation to companion**

*What do I see?*

*Looking through those eyes of my prejudice  
who do I see?*

*Gazing into those eyes of suffering*

*Do I see at once sinner and the penitent?*

*Will I see one deserving of mercy?*

*These thoughts, they haunt me  
for I wonder what they are seeing in me.  
Lord, let me see ... and be truly seen.*

Mercy, as compassion, belongs to those things which are eternal. Just as God's mercy/love/kindness/compassion is timeless. Therefore, to be merciful is a lifelong calling; it is who we are and always becoming.

In the midst of insults and torture it is Jesus who shows mercy and the courage and the anguish of choice. This is when mockery gives way to confession, and confession gives way to compassion and hope.

Compassion is primarily understood as feeling with, or deep empathy and loving kindness; compassion can also be understood as anger, rage, and indignation. In this way mercy and justice embrace.

After the lament is a cry of hope to the God who remains with us. And so, Jesus spoke this word,

*“Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.”*

This is indeed a surprising place from where mercy flows.

## **Sacred reading**

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

**Luke 6:36**

*“Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”*

**Matthew 5:7**

“Jesus took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake.” And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, “Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want.”

**Mark 14:33-36**

Have mercy on me, Lord, for I am faint;  
heal me, Lord, for my bones are in agony.

My soul is in deep anguish.  
How long, Lord, how long?

Turn, Lord, and deliver me;  
save me because of your unfailing love.

Among the dead no one proclaims your name.  
Who praises you from the grave?

I am worn out from my groaning.

All night long I flood my bed with weeping  
and drench my couch with tears.

My eyes grow weak with sorrow;  
they fail because of all my foes.

Away from me, all you who do evil,  
for the Lord has heard my weeping.

The Lord has heard my cry for mercy;  
the Lord accepts my prayer.

**Psalms 6:2-9**



## Reflection: conversations of hope

**The death and the resurrection of Christ is the end of abandonment. Jesus' own presence in death and resurrection acts not only as companion toward death, but witness to hope in death.**

Indeed, the image of Jesus present with the criminals on their crosses symbolises both companion and hope. Nobody dies alone, whatever their situation.

Indeed, Jesus was always companioned by the two or three. Their profound contradictions are expressed by mockery and confession, lament and hope, grief, and death, not what I want, but what the other wants. Jesus remains in the centre for them all.

Although it may be difficult to remain in the midst of pain and lament, the conversations evoke one's respect for their dignity of will.

It seems the question of presence is pertinent throughout the process, and not just to the moment actioning VAD.

What does it mean in terms of abandonment, in what one might consider the most challenging of moments for us the companion, and for the person?

What might mercy look like for a person on a VAD pathway?

It may mean looking for the end of suffering. It may be the strength to continue, whatever continue might mean. It may be looking for reassurance, permission, or prohibition. It may mean going it alone. For the one who is companioning it may mean remaining in that intense liminal space of lament and hope.

If mercy and compassion are also actions for justice, consider how moral rage may be a transforming mercy where a persons' situation has become unbearable and undignified, where the suffering is seen as cruelty.

## Practice

**In the parable of the *Good Samaritan* (Luke 10:25-37) Jesus calls for the church and its ministries to exemplify accompaniment, in which the Samaritan also moves in and out of the accompaniment that transforms through loving presence and actions in the companionship of others, health professionals, carers, and family.**

Even when it seems that there is nothing more to do there remains much to do, because remaining by the side of the sick and suffering is a sign of love and of the hope that it contains. The actions of the Samaritan, who has been called “good,” serve as an example of companioning. There is a language and a character which one embodies in your presence and your practice.

Therefore, our unconditional presence is a witness to the comfort and hope of the Gospel. Likewise, our unconditional absence is an expression of trust and respect for all others who may be involved. It is important that your presence and your absence be steady and consistent in both your language and your embodiment.

Such companioning is inspired by “God’s indulgent love” that “always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transforms broken hearts through the way of the cross of Jesus from where we hear the words promise and hope.”

“Companioning”, as *Pope Francis* explains it, “means removing our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf Exodus 3:5), with the goal of making present the fragrance of Christ’s closeness and his personal gaze.”

How might you prepare yourself?

What sandals might you need to remove?

This sacred ground may be a burning bush, a muddy sty, a nursing bed, a family home, a back verandah, or a broken van. It is the place where:

“Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;  
Righteousness and peace will kiss each other.  
Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,  
and righteousness will look down from the sky.”

**Psalms 85:10-11**

You may offer to play a song or a hymn, for example:

“I heard the voice of Jesus say,  
Come unto me and rest  
Lay down, O weary one, lay down  
Your head upon my breast?”

**Horatius Bonar Together in Song 585**

*Remaining by the side of the sick  
and suffering is a sign of love and  
of the hope that it contains.*

## Prayers

On the sacred ground of prayer, we can bring to utterance these contradictions where our silent fears keep us apart.

God of mercy, I don't want to live, and I don't want to die.  
I don't want to live like this, but I'm not sure how I want to die.  
I'm not sure I can decide.

Your mercy was shown to rich and poor alike,  
to those who were sick and those who were dying.  
Show me your mercy now,  
guide me to the right decision for me and mine.  
Cry as we cry, hold us together as we seek answers.  
And bind us forever in your love. **Amen.**

Help me, God  
help me.  
Help me not to understand  
But to know  
To know that you are with me  
To know that my loved ones are your loved ones also  
To know that I can bear the impossible  
To know that suffering fades  
To know that help come in unexpected guises  
To know that life in all its fullness is always present  
To know that compassion arises when we call for it  
To know that help comes  
Help me, God

**p.95, Heaven on Earth** | Stephanie Dowrick

# Community

...is born and rises from the rawness  
of shared life together

“...with all humility and gentleness, with patience,  
bearing with one another in love, making every effort to  
maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.”

*Ephesians 4:2-3*

## A human experience on the way toward VAD

### **The third word: the community is rebuilt**

#### Invitation to companion

*We watched each other from afar, separated, alone  
not sure to come close  
not sure to be far*

*so, we waited  
the old was passing away before our eyes  
and the new was being woven from its threads, together  
And so we came.*

As others are feeling broken and alone, and relationships are changing before them, Jesus does not leave us orphaned. In this word a new kinship family is created and a compassionate partnership is formed.

In this scene Jesus notices his mother and his disciple, each now alone.

As he commends them to each other, a new community is being born.

... and Jesus said to them,

*“Woman, behold your son.  
Son, behold your mother.”*

“Although you had a beginning in your physical creation—before which you were nothing—yet your true being had always been in God without beginning and shall always be in God without ending, as God is.”

**The Cloud of Unknowing (14 century)**

## **Reflect**

Human life is profoundly relational. As God is community as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, we are created from and for community. There are no isolated, self-made individuals. We are made for relationship and find fulfilment in healthy and life-supporting relationships and communities.

**In Sure and Certain Hope**

Within human life and community there is always a diversity of cultures and traditions, in particular, the unique place of our First Nation peoples.



The only role God can play in relation to our brokenness is that of healer and sustainer. All God can do is radiate this attraction through and from the one who in this world remained steadfastly in that light even when he was being destroyed.

**p.23, Love Set Free | Martin L Smith**

The irony is that the cross itself is the very place where the community of love is created. In the midst of his suffering, Jesus begins to weave this community from the small band of people who had the courage to keep company with him as he hung upon the cross, starting with his mother and the disciple whom he loved. From the cross where Jesus is drawing all to himself he begins to weave the community of those who will live from intimacy with himself, intimacy with God through him.

**p.33, Love Set Free | Martin L Smith**

In a world waiting to be born, there is a community waiting to be re-birthed. We hear the groans and with the Spirit share them as our own. We cannot create this, for this new community can only emerge through the companionship of the shared experience of pain and lament.

## **Sacred reading**

My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

**John 17:20 – 23**

...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

**Ephesians 4:2-3**

# Practice

**We live and work within an ecumenical and multi-faith society, a shared humanity with at times differing perspectives. And in this community the learning of new ways of communicating is continually being revealed.**

For First Nation peoples, particular attention and sensitivities will need to be observed and learned. Respectfully, in many indigenous communities death and dying is not spoken of openly or very well. For some communities it remains a taboo.

There will be new communities of companions formed and revealed on this pilgrimage to dying. In these new communities, if only for a while, will be medical teams, health carers, spiritual carers, neighbours and friends who may only be there for a time and for this season (see Ecclesiastes 3:1-13).

## Consider:

How will we be after all this is over?

What will our new life be?

Who will we be together, and or apart?

How we might learn from one another?

This new community may contain family, friends and strangers. It will also contain the absence of the one who has died. Healing in this situation may invariably only be found in dying.

In this community there will be links to traditions, familiar stories and sacred moments that nourish the body and the soul which are now being made new for this time. These can be found in the intercessions of God's people, in music, memories, sacraments, reminiscence, prayers and belonging. And, in the attention to language and understanding.

“With this is the practice of the paradox of hospitality in that it wants to create emptiness, a friendly emptiness where strangers can enter and discover themselves as created free. This is the offer of a gifted space to the person where they can find their own life.”

#### **The Compassionate Visitor**

“When such trust in the steadfast mercy of the caregiver takes place, true comfort and healing follow.”

#### **The Compassionate Visitor**



# Prayer

The parting from a community is painful, but the oneness extends beyond this present time and place. In the parting is the enfolding, and in the community of Jesus, there's nothing *up there* that isn't *right here*.

God of grace,

We gather in the sure and certain knowledge that you are with us and will never desert us. You know of our reality, the decisions for which we must prepare.

Help us to recognise everything (name) has done in life and in death.

Help us to see that death does not define who and what we are in life.

May (name) remain with us through our memories, our stories and our love. **Amen.**



*There's nothing up there  
that isn't right here.*

We are here, and we don't want to be.

We respect all that (name) has been in life to us, all that he/she has achieved, all that he/she has shown us and shared with us.

Be with us as we release (name) into your eternal care knowing that you will always be with us and her/him.

We are here because we love (name) and because we have been present in his/her life, so it is only fitting we are present, too, in death.

Beyond this life, beyond this death, we trust in your eternal love.

Help us not be overwhelmed but be able to speak of this time together. **Amen.**

## A blessing

We wrap you round  
with earth and flowers  
We wrap you round with love  
We wrap you round  
with songs and stories  
we wrap you round with love  
with prayers for your journey  
we wrap you round with love.

**p.130, Saying Goodbye** | Ruth Burgess



# Abandonment

... in the howl of lament is the  
turning toward hope

“God is light, and in God there is no darkness at all.”

*1 John 1:5*

“Even the darkness is as light to you.”

*Psalms 1:39*

## A human experience on the way toward VAD **The fourth word: abandonment**

### Invitation to companion

*Where are you God?*

*My eyes cannot see you, my heart cannot feel you*

*I cannot recognise you right now*

*I am not sure that I know you*

*I am not sure I know myself*

*and my soul feels bereft...*

*There you are God*

*you look different*

*you feel different*

*but now I am beginning to see*

*You are there God, and I did not know it.*

At the centre of the seven words that Jesus spoke from the cross is the cry of abandonment. It is the centre of the rage we must all acknowledge. There is no truth without rage—and this rage is a howl that rises from the very centre of one's soul and for a moment it is all about me! This word offers a place of reckoning along the VAD pathway while offering the promise that no one is abandoned, not even in this most crucial of moments.

Jesus let out a loud cry;

*“My God, my God, why  
did you abandon me?”*



To feel left behind, lost and cut off, is terrifying; but to feel this in our very soul, it is the howl coming out of one's very existence—it is the howl as one sees bodies ravaged and minds tormented by illness. It is the howl of the soul on its way toward love. It is the soul howling as it leaves other loves behind.

“God cannot overpower us, nor force us in any direction. In the vulnerability of the cross God reveals that the only power that can change us is one that attracts us freely, with the offer of healing.”

**p.22 Love Set Free** | Martin L Smith

## Sacred reading

**It is suggested this Psalm 22 be read in its entirety as it offers a way of movement through the VAD pathway. We cry out, and we are heard.**

“My God, my God, why did you abandon me? Why are you so far from helping me, from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry by day, but you do not answer; and by night, but find no rest ...

For he did not despise or abhor the affliction of the afflicted; he did not hide his face from me, but heard when I cried to him.”

### **Selected verses from Psalm 22**

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.  
You know when I sit down and when I rise up;  
you discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search out my path and my lying down,  
and are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know  
it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand  
upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
it is so high that I cannot attain it.

Where can I go from your spirit?  
Or where can I flee from your presence?

If I ascend to heaven, you are there;  
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.

If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest  
limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me,  
and your right hand shall hold me fast.

If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,  
and the light around me become night,"  
even the darkness is not dark to you;  
the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

**Psalms 139**

## Reflection

**Sometimes a question is not a question at all.  
It can be a rhetorical comment that is not seeking  
an answer but opening up a mystery.**

Sometimes a question is all we have, or need, to help us  
find our way. When is a question not a question? When  
it is the answer.

*Where is God?*

*Where am I?*

*Why would God allow me to suffer like this?*

*Why doesn't God want me?*

*What will I abandon? (values, beliefs); will my faith  
survive this?*

*Will I go now, or will I stay to the end?*

*How will I know?*

Offer and allow questions without offering answers.  
*Where will be the place of reckoning for you?*

Every decision about death is a judgement about life. Often, the pain is not in the dying or the illness, but in the loneliness of being a person that others could not bear to see. To bear to be present, to observe the ravages of an illness and make a commitment in lament and hope, this is the gift of faithful companionship.

## Practice

**As Christians, our best resource in facing death and ministering to a dying person is our resurrection hope that we have in Christ, our risen Saviour.**

As we face death with others, we will fall back on these promises, not as a way of avoiding death but as a way of journeying through it into the mysteries of the fulfilment of the promised new life in Christ. We must always be ready to share the hope that is within us, as those whom we are serving indicate they are ready to hear. As dying persons discover that we are comfortable in dealing with these issues, they may open the way for us to share our own faith. One needs to be careful here not to be argumentative or even persuasive. Rather, the simple sharing of our genuinely held faith, which is informed by biblical promises, will be sufficient.

One of the most helpful aspects for our resurrection faith is the reality that Christ our Lord has himself gone through the pilgrimage of dying. Because of this, his promise that he will never forsake us can bring great comfort and strength even in this darkest hour.

**p.100, The Compassionate Visitor** | Arthur H Becker

Acknowledging suffering associated with a terminal illness is vital. Suffering includes much more than physical suffering and is experienced because of, but not limited to fear of death itself, anxiety about loved ones left behind, feelings of being a burden, and disappointment because of unfulfilled dreams and plans.

Acknowledging these existential aspects of suffering is a vital aspect of good palliative care (as it is of good pastoral care).

**From Final Report to Qld Synod 2019**

*Acknowledging suffering  
associated with a terminal  
illness is vital.*

# Prayers

God of grace, I grieve all that I have lost:  
the life I once lived, the life I hoped to live, the death  
I hoped to die.

At this time, I sit with disappointment and frustration,  
From where will my hope come?

I seek guidance in my decisions.

I seek peace for those who love me,

I seek healing in whatever form it can take at this time and  
in this reality.

I want to feel close to you, God of grace, so that my final  
choice brings relief, either in life or death. **Amen.**

Dear God,

We struggle, we grow weary, we grow tired.

We are exhausted, we are distressed, we despair.

We give up, we fall down, we let go.

We cry. We are empty, we grow calm, we are ready.

We wait quietly.

A small, shy truth arrives. Arrives from without and within.  
Arrives and is born. Simple, steady, clear. Like a mirror, like  
a bell, like a flame. Like rain in summer. A precious truth  
arrives and is born within us.

Within our emptiness.

We accept it, we observe it, we absorb it. We surrender to  
our bare truth. We are nourished, we are changed. We are  
blessed. We rise up.

For this we give thanks. **Amen.**

**A Common Prayer** | Michael Leunig

# Love

Jesus emptied himself of all but love,  
and he poured his love into our hearts

“As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs  
for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living  
God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?”

*Psalms 42:2*

A Human Experience on the way toward VAD

## **The fifth word: Love—thirst— depletion—empty**

### Invitation to companion

*After the rage;  
To be empty, O so empty,  
to be gutted, this is the thirst  
to have given all,  
this is not simply, I want a drink...  
this thirst has a partner, it is hunger,  
together they are justice and righteousness.  
and Jesus said;*

*“I am thirsty.”*



In this space, we can begin to believe that the darkness knows what it is doing: despite being insecure in ego, we can become secure in soul. There begins the appreciation in the most profound of senses of what it means to be in God's hand: we can be so deeply immersed within the hand's hollow without knowing it, that for the moment, we cannot see clearly where we are.

**p.89, Drinking Deeply learning to listen to the song of your soul**

Patrick Oliver

Along this pathway people will become weary and time worn, at times torn between the reality of a terminal illness, love of family and the reality of dying. This reality can equally be expressed as a longing to be with Christ in a new and pain free life.

## **Sacred reading**

Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord

Lord, hear my voice!

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications!

If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand?

But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word, I hope;

My soul waits for the Lord

more than those who watch for the morning,

more than those who watch for the morning.

O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is great power to redeem.

It is he who will redeem Israel from all its iniquities.

**Psalms 130**

## Reflect

What are my own personal beliefs about VAD?

What spiritual and theological resources do I have to make ethical decisions about VAD?

How do I feel about accompanying a person who has chosen VAD?

Are there other issues in my life right now that might distract me from being fully present with the person as a person?

Am I engaging in self-care and do I have a supportive community to strengthen me as I make difficult ethical decisions?

**p.26, Walk the Mile and Bear the Load: A Guide for Pastoral and Spiritual Care for Patients Considering Medical Assistance in Dying** | Heinrich

Will I be up to it?

Do I want to be involved?

These, and many questions and doubts will come and go. Some will be fleeting, some will plague our conscience, even threaten our wisdom.

“How do we care deeply for those facing end-of-life decisions, without betraying our faith, theology, or denominational position? One answer is to respond with, “No, we don’t do that,” and then refuse all further discussion of the right to assisted dying. But that refusal constitutes—if not an abandonment of those suffering—an abandonment of pastoral responsibility and a missed ministry opportunity. Moreover, the desperation that many grievously ill patients experience will, in the eyes of many Christians, make this response seem heartless.”

**p.142 – 53, “Ministry amid Competing Values: Pastoral Care and Medical Assistance in Dying,” Direction 47, no 2 (2018)**

Gloria J Woodland

Yet this is also experienced as a heart-felt “homecoming”, something we suspect has been intimated within from our first moments, but it seems to have always just eluded us. The divine restlessness stirred by this melody is a haunting refrain heard in our resurrection experiences, yet we recognise it old, even older than our very self. It is that for which we have thirsted from the beginning, yet have not been able to name; it is what seems foreign to whom we seem to ourselves, yet is as personal as our thumbprint; it is an unnameable sense of homesickness, a reminiscence of a future moment; it is for what we have searched since infancy, yet mistake in a thousand cravings.

**p.96, Drinking Deeply | Patrick Oliver**



# Practice

***The Code of the Ethics and Ministry Practice in the UCA* invites ministers to pay attention to the particular place ministers have in the community, the exercise of influence and power, to recognise their own vulnerability and take responsibility for their own self-care and supervision.**

There will be times of deep emptying, depletion of energy, of will and maybe even love. There will be also times of rich embrace and exchange where each can refresh the other. With respect and mutuality, even in the midst of (shared) vulnerability, it will be important to have time for personal prayer or rest and, to leave the other to the same personal space.

“Theologically we continue to assert that human persons, being in the image of God, are the bearers of an inalienable dignity that calls us to treat each person not merely with respect, but with love, care, and compassion.”

“This calling, being a reflection of God’s free grace, is in no way qualified by the circumstances that an individual may face, no matter how tragic. Neither is that inherent dignity diminished nor heightened by the decisions they make in those circumstances, even if they differ from the decisions that pastors might in good conscience make or recommend.”

**“In sure and certain hope”. p.3, Resources to Assist Pastoral and Theological Approaches to Physician Assisted Dying | The General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada and Canada.**

## Prayers

God of eternal life, I want to die  
I cannot live this life that I have now  
But others want me to live it, urge me to live it.  
However that life may look to me or to them.  
I am confused, I am disturbed, I long for peace.  
But how will I find peace—in life or in death?  
Or is there somewhere in between?  
God of life, show me where my life should lead now,  
guide my words as I share how I feel with those whom I live.  
Take my fear and clear my mind. **Amen.**

God of mercy,  
I don't want to live and I don't want to die.  
I don't want to live like this,  
But I'm not sure how I want to die.  
I'm not sure I can decide.  
Your mercy was shown to rich and poor alike,  
to those who were sick and those who were dying.  
Show me your mercy now,  
guide me to the right decision for me and mine.  
Cry as we cry, hold us together as we seek answers.  
And bind us forever in your love. **Amen.**

*“And the greatest of these is love”*

**1 Corinthians 13:13**

# Legacy

This is my bequest to you, love  
one another as I have loved you

“Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you.  
As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”  
When he had said this, he breathed on them  
and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.”

*John 20:21-22*

A human experience on the way toward VAD

## **The sixth word: legacy**

### **Invitation to companion**

*The life that I have received, I now hand on.*

*It was received with gratitude*

*lived to its fullness.*

*I have no regrets,*

*So, now I hand it on to you*

*my God, and my family,*

*and with these words say it is your world now,*

*receive it with gratitude and treat it with respect.*

It is done, I am done.

In this phrase, likely towards the end of the VAD consideration process, there is an acceptance of the fulfilment of a life lived.

Regretful contentment, forgiveness offered, words, emotions, silence—all is said and done.

So Jesus said,

*“It is finished.”*

Paul spoke of the passing on of the tradition of the Gospel, “what I have received, so I now pass on to you” (1 Corinthians 11:23). This then, is an important part of our companioning as we speak of the witness of one's living and one's dying. It is one's last will and testament that can be shared personally as a living legacy. Here the contemplations on the meaning of one's life, and there may be many, are shaped and spoken perhaps for the last time.

## Sacred reading

“I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.”

**John 14:27**

“And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honourable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Then the God of peace will be with you.”

**Philippians 4:8-9**

“Now may the Lord of peace himself give you his peace at all times and in every situation. The Lord be with you all.”

### **2 Thess 3:16**

“I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”

### **Philippians 4:12-13**

## **When you are looking for help**

### **A song of ascents**

I will lift up my eyes to the hills—  
From whence comes my help?  
My help comes from the LORD,  
Who made heaven and earth.  
He will not allow your foot to be moved;  
He who keeps you will not slumber.  
Behold, He who keeps Israel  
Shall neither slumber nor sleep.

The LORD is your keeper;  
The LORD is your shade at your right hand.  
The sun shall not strike you by day,  
Nor the moon by night.  
The LORD shall preserve you from all evil;  
He shall preserve your soul.  
The LORD shall preserve your going out and your coming in  
From this time forth, and even forevermore.

### **Psalms 121**

# Reflection

## Hearing story involves telling story, of honouring a life lived and the legacy and impact on others.

Consider the things still undone, and may not be able to be done. Consider regrets, disappointments now being resolved. What happens when a person feels their life loses meaning? Perhaps the greatest loss is disillusionment. That is why this companioning resource is entitled *Remaining in lament and hope*.

Ritual provides us with a vehicle to acknowledge change or transition. When a death occurs everything changes for the people left behind. The conduct of a ritual is like a pilgrimage from the life that was your reality to a different life that will become your new reality, something you had no choice about. You do have a choice in how you want to mark this change.

**p.219, The Death Talker** | Molly Carlile

Consider what rituals and traditions have been part of the person's life, and what rituals you could offer in the VAD pathway.

Rituals may be formal or informal, creative, safe, and free of judgement, offering hope. Entering into death is primarily an act of hope, not simply despair.

*Ritual provides us with a vehicle to acknowledge change or transition.*

# Practice

## Some elements that may be considered

**It would seem this could be an ideal context in which to invite the person and their loved ones (with the person's permission) to be part of constructing a ritual which has meaning for them.**

Creation of a sacred space, inclusion of symbols, specific objects. A way of entry into this space, to join a shared emotional connection, crossing a threshold, the way of physically moving through spaces. Tributes, speeches, toasting, aesthetics, and the language be familial.

It is important that the ritual reach an end point, we might call it benediction or blessing as is appropriate for the person. It does need to come to an ending. In this particular place the person may indeed pronounce their own benediction as part of their pathway and legacy.

Consider a departure ritual, how loved ones, health and care professionals, and yourself may depart from a celebration, from the time around dying, or from a funeral. What is going to happen next?

Part of the practice may include the use of Liturgy, Scripture, Blessings, Songs/Hymns, use of *Lectio Divina*, and we offer the following possibilities:

1. Letters written/video recorded for loved ones with last words
2. Phone/video calls with those who are not present
3. Legacy piece: journal, family favourite recipes, piece of art
4. Remembering story, preparing their own eulogy.
5. Ritual: can calm the feelings of helplessness and give order to feelings as they arise.

Refer to the booklet, *'Emotional, spiritual and ethical end of life issues. 'Preparing for Death' pages 29-34*, for further possibilities.

## Prayer

There are only two feelings. Love and fear.  
there are only two languages. Love and fear  
there are only two activities. Love and fear  
there are only two motives, two procedures,  
two frameworks, two results. Love and fear.  
Love and fear.

**A Common Prayer** | Michael Leunig



Gracious Loving God,

We acknowledge your presence with us and give thanks that we are not left alone. We hold fast to your promise that you will never leave us.

We give thanks for the gift of life.

As we gather at this time with grateful hearts we give thanks for (name)

We honour a life lived and acknowledge the influence and impact of her/his life. Memories held of experiences and wisdom shared.

We pray your blessing over (name) in these days and ask that your gift of promised peace be evident, we pray for a calm spirit and quiet mind.

We pray too for the family, that as they share these moments together your peace will be evident in their midst, for each of them, according to their need may your blessing be upon them.

We ask, Lord, for your hand to remain upon the continued care, conversations and decisions still to come, may plans and purposes unfold and your will be done.

For you, (name), may the Lord bless you and keep you,  
May the Lord smile upon and be gracious to you.

May the Lord show his favour and give you his peace. **Amen.**

**Prayer from VICTAS Synod response**

“Jesus is the embodiment of humanity thirsting for God.  
And precisely as that, Jesus is the incarnation of God,  
thirsting for us and for creation.”

**p.47, Love Set Free | Martin L Smith**

# Reconcile

## Faith into death

“To “listen” another’s soul into a condition of disclosure and discovery may be almost the greatest service that any human being ever performs for another.”

*Douglas Steere*

“Gleanings: A Random Harvest”

A human experience on the way toward VAD

## **The final word: reconcile: faith into death**

### Invitation to companion

#### Contemplations of the one who is dying

*What will happen after this?*

*Who will care for my body?*

*Who will care for my family?*

*Will I have a funeral, or a wake? ...*

*these questions, and many more*

*I place in trust to those who will bring all things together.*

As Jesus committed his spirit into the hands of God, it was also into the human hands of Joseph and the two Marys Jesus' body was received. They came lovingly to take his body down from the place of mockery and cruelty. They embraced, they anointed, they held for while death in their living hands. In this way, they gave dignity in the dying and, after the dying. In this way consideration is to be made for following one's dying.

To commit one's spirit into the hands of God, is to commit our spirit to Love. In the same way in entrusting our dying among human hands is to also commit our lives to love.

God is love.

The dying and death of Jesus strips away everything else. The barriers, the curtains, the divisions are all open.

*“Father, into your hands  
I commit my spirit.”*

(the final breath, a sacred sigh)

**Luke 23:46**

# Reconciliation

**“The restoration of relationships or put another way to bring things back to their former or original state”.**

At the same time, we recognise that things will not be the same, and never will be. Reconciliation includes the consolation of peace.

As you have been a companion to someone on this journey of VAD it is likely that your own expectations, values and beliefs have been challenged. It is important that you make time and space for reflection, healing and reconciliation. To help you in the process of reconciliation, you will recognise and understand that this process happens in different ways for all.

The process of reconciliation can include the shifting of expectations, agreeing to disagree, inner resolution or living within honoured space.

As a Reflective practice—name what is happening for you at this time. Ask; Am I holding onto something I need to let go of?

“Deep within us the intuition stirs that this is a symbol of Jesus’ own seamless intimacy with God, which remains untorn even in the midst of torture and death. It is a unity that is woven by God in one piece from top to bottom, a unity that is God’s gift and self-expression.”

It is the mystery that we desire for ourselves. The wound we long to have healed is the tear in the fabric of our hearts that estranges us from the ground and source of our being, from the divine heart. It is the vision of Jesus' own intimacy and union that draws us to stay at the cross so that he might clothe us with the seamless robe of the humanity that has become truly human at last because it has been reunited with God."

**p.25, Love Set Free** | Martin L Smith

## Prayer and sacred reading

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference.

### **The Serenity Prayer**

Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my anxious thoughts.

### **Psalms 139:23**

Create in me a clean heart O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me.

### **Psalm 51:10**

*The wound we long to  
have healed is the tear in  
the fabric of our hearts.*

# Practice

**You may offer these practices and patterns of *Lectio Divina* and the *Prayer of Examen* to guide each person in reconciling their thoughts and emotions from the events of the present day.**

This may include personal acts of confession, absolution, making good, and making peace, and embracing in good order how this fits into the fullness of one's life.

## A way of beginning

“Seek in reading and you will find in meditation, knock in prayer and it will be opened to you in contemplation”

### **St John of the Cross**

“Listen carefully, dear child, to the guidance of your teacher, attend to it with the ears of your heart. This guidance is from a “father” who loves you; welcome it ...”

### **Saint Benedict's Rule**

Consider how these exercises might be a meaningful practice for you, the pastoral companion, and how you might offer them to a person on a VAD pathway.

# The Practice of *Lectio Divina*

**Read the verse slowly, several times, listening to the whisper of God. Some methods of *Lectio Divina* recommend reading the verses at least four times and maybe even in different translations.**

- Is there a word or phrase that begins to stand out to you?
- The word or phrase that grabs your heart may not be the main idea of the passage. Listen and be open to how God wants to use his Word to speak into your heart.
- Begin to repeat that word or phrase over and over slowly, soaking your heart in the words.

## Reflect

Reflect and meditate on the words you heard in the Scripture passage, attentive to what speaks to your heart.

- Sit in the silence and allow God the space to speak to you as you turn the words over in your mind.
- Ponder what these words mean for your life.
- What hope or encouragement do these words bring to you?
- What next step do you feel God asking you to take?

## Respond

Respond in prayer to what you heard from God and how the words spoke to your heart.

- Continue turning your word or phrase over and over in your mind.
- Share your heart with God in prayer, responding to this Word.

## Rest

Rest in God and contemplate the Spirit's words for your life. Sit in the silence and just "be" with God for a few minutes. Open your heart to God's presence and allow God's words to permeate your soul.

- You may want to journal your experience so you can see how God is moving in your life.
- Record the verse you used and what you heard God speak to your heart.
- Write down how those words apply to your life and how God is calling you to action in response.

## The prayer of Examen/ A review of each day

**St. Ignatius Loyola's Examen is an opportunity for peaceful daily reflective prayer. It invites one to find the movement of God in all the people present through the events of the day, and in the acts of this companioning.**

1. Become aware of God's presence.
2. Review the day with gratitude.
3. Pay attention to your emotions.
4. Choose one feature of the day and pray from it.
5. Look toward tomorrow.

## A prayer for the closing of the day

O Lord,  
support us by your grace through  
the hours of life's day  
until the shadow lengthen  
and the busy world is hushed,  
the fever of life is over and the evening comes.  
Then, Lord, in your mercy,  
grant us a safe lodging,  
a holy rest,  
and peace at last  
through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

**Uniting In Worship 2**

## A blessing

“On this echoing-day of your birth, may you open the gift of solitude in order to receive your soul; enter the generosity of silence to hear your hidden heart; know the serenity of stillness to be enfolded anew by the miracle of your being.”

**To Bless the Space Between Us** | John O'Donohue

# Epilogue

“Take my hand and lead me to salvation  
Take my love, for love is everlasting  
And remember the truth that once was spoken:  
To love another person is to see the face of God.”

*Victor Hugo*

“Les Miserable”

## A human experience on the way toward VAD Epilogue

**We entered a companionship on a Voluntary Assisted Dying pathway by prayer and invitation. In the epilogue we recognise a pathway leads to an ending and a resting place.**

Along this path there will have been other companions; health professionals, carers, and families; thoughts and beliefs, shattered hopes, and disturbing fears. In that place where words often fail us we are called to be and to bring to speech the experience of God even in the midst of VAD as we attempt to compassionately accompany people on this pathway.

We have sought to witness to God's good gift of creation and the intrinsic worth and dignity of all people in every circumstance that is grounded in a reality that is untouched by the circumstances of our lives or death.

Jesus described this mission foundation as "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10), where this fullness of life includes the reality of suffering, of being human and remaining human. In this resource, we offer as its corollary "death in all its dignity."

The context and the practice in which we are placed is guided by the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 Qld, Legislation, the Synod position on VAD and the relevant policy of the organisation we are working within.

## Recommendations to Synod

### That the Synod –

Affirm the following position:

... we are opposed to the legalisation of voluntary assisted dying in Queensland. If legalised, our facilities will not provide this as a service and our staff will not participate in medical acts to end a life through voluntary assisted dying.

A compassionate and pastoral response in the Synod agencies includes working with people and families who choose, and access voluntary assisted dying to offer emotional, psychological, and social support, spiritual and pastoral care, and minimising physical suffering. This response does not include medically participating in acts intended to end life through a voluntary assisted dying process.

**Final Report to Queensland Synod 2019**

'Patch' Hunter Adams in his book *Gesundheit* comments “... we ... are here to help patients/people live the highest quality of life and, when that is no longer possible, to facilitate the highest quality of death. He goes on to say, “... whenever I spend time with a dying person I have, in fact, found a living person.”

**p.81, *Gesundheit* | Patch Adams**

Therefore, watching a person die is at the same time to watch them live. We watch a person live until it is into that moment of passing over, passing through, to where the body rests in death.

There is no greater validation of faith than the reality of death. Whatever a person's belief system may be, when vulnerable and distressed, certain, and reconciled, the gift of the companion is to enable them to surrender into peace once again, or perhaps, for the very first time.

We acknowledge that death is not simply a clinical event, it is perhaps the most significant of existential events for it draws in acutely the meaning of the whole of our life, our relationships, and our legacy.

The meaning of one's life will rest in its epilogue.

## **What happens after the dying?**

There will be a new wave of grief.

There will be practical tasks to complete.

What will happen to the body.

*The meaning of one's life will  
rest in its epilogue.*



How will we leave, those who were present.  
We can prepare to expect the expected, but dying  
still remains a mystery,  
will they die as they should, what about any  
unexpected effects.

How will you say goodbye for the last time, before  
the dying.

You may be invited to conduct the funeral.  
Continue to companion the family or friends.  
They may have experienced a traditional funeral before,  
how different will this experience be?

We do not enter into death lightly, or selfishly  
but responsibly and in the love of God.

## A prayer

May God sustain you in your dying  
embrace you in reconciling grace  
receive you in the abundance of mercy

May the thoughts of your mind  
the instincts of your body and  
the longings of your spirit  
be embraced in peace

May God accompany you  
in the time of your parting  
and comfort your loved ones as you leave. **Amen.**

There will be the time when you conclude your companioning and you leave the VAD pathway for this particular person. That may happen at any time along the pathway and it will be important to formally close the pastoral relationship/s as becomes appropriate.

## **A litany of lament as you go.**

**Here in this place, here in our darkness—**

It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness

**We light this Candle, a light for our journey,**

warmth on the way through the cold loneliness of our fear.

It is the light of the world; it is the light of Christ.

**It is the light of our love; it is the light on our way.**

**We light this candle, in faith, hope and love. Amen.**

**Here in this place, here in this flickering light**

give us courage and grace to allow this candle to extinguish.

**it may blow quickly**

it may flicker a while

but we must let it go out, where even the darkness is light to God.

**We extinguish this candle, in faith, hope and love. Amen.**

**A Litany of Lament as you go Rev James Stevenson**

*“It’s so much darker  
when a light goes out  
than it would have been  
if it had never shone.”*

**The Winter of Our Discontent | John Steinbeck**



# Conversation prompts

**As you enter the person's space, be aware of your own feelings and internal responses but do not let those drive the conversation.**

It is vital to remind ourselves coercive or suggestive influence is not permissible and to be aware that people may have heightened vulnerabilities. Before the asking of questions, you are encouraged to hear their story.

Let the person and their concerns lead the way. It is important not to argue with them or express shock or disapproval of what they say. Do not engage with any clinical or process questions but undertake to find out who they should talk to if they express such concerns.

The following questions may be useful in such a conversation but they are not intended as a prescribed list or to be asked in any particular order.

1. How can I help you?
2. What has prompted you to ask that?
3. What are your main concerns at the moment?
4. Have you talked with your doctors—what have they told you?
5. What are your fears?
6. What are your hopes?
7. What do you understand about what scripture says about your situation? How important is that to you?
8. Have you been able to pray about your situation? How did you feel after praying?
9. Would you like me to pray? What would you like me to pray?

10. What are your thoughts/understandings/fears about your illness/dying?
11. What are your fears/ hopes for your loved ones?
12. Who have you talked to about this decision?
13. Who would or could you like to talk to?  
What would you like them to know about you?  
What would you like them to know about why you have made the decision to go ahead/not go ahead with VAD?  
What would you like them to know about the struggles, fears, hopes you are experiencing at the moment?
14. Are there people you need to talk to before you go ahead with VAD? Are there things that need to be said before you go ahead?
15. Have you considered funeral arrangements?
16. What have you learnt and discovered about yourself by considering this pathway?

## Familiar movements through grief

Not all stages, nor in this order will be experienced by every person.

<b>Denial</b>	No.
<b>Anger</b>	Why?
<b>Bargaining</b>	If.
<b>Depression</b>	Gloom.
<b>Acceptance</b>	If it must be.

*A bruised reed shall he not  
break, a flickering flame he  
will not extinguish.*

**Isaiah 42:3**

# Documents and book list

It would be helpful to become familiar with the key documents listed below to better understand Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 Qld, Legislation, the Synod position on VAD and the relevant policy of the organisation we are working within.

## Key documents

Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2021 Queensland

Voluntary Assisted Dying Policy (Uniting Care)  
*Uniting Church in Australia Qld Synod*

Final Report Voluntary Assisted Dying—  
Queensland Synod 2019

Queensland Synod Bioethics Committee 2013 ***Emotional, spiritual and ethical end-of-life issues An information booklet for clergy, health professionals and those facing end-of-life issues*** Uniting Church





## Book list and resources

Carlile, Molly 2016 ***The Death Talker The more we talk the less we fear. What we need to know to help us talk about death*** New Holland 2016

Boyce, Geoff 2010 ***An Improbable Feast The Surprising dynamic of hospitality at the heart of multifaith chaplaincy*** Geoff Boyce

Singh, Kathleen Dowling 1998 ***The Grace in Dying A Message of Hope, Comfort, and Spiritual Transformation*** Harper One

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 1954 ***Life Together The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*** Harper One

Freeman, J, Stephen 2005 ***Grief and Loss Understanding the Journey*** Brooks/Cole

McRae – McMahon, Dorothy 2010 ***Rituals for Life, Love and Loss Prayers and meditations for marriage, birthdays, baby naming, loss and grief*** Jane Curry

Becker, H, Arthur 1985 ***The Compassionate Visitor Resources for Ministering to People who are Ill*** Augsburg Publishing House

Oliver, Patrick 1999 ***Drinking Deeply learning to listen to the song of your soul*** J & K Printing

McCormick, T, Patrick, Connors, Jr. B. Russell Character 1998 ***Choices & Community The Three Faces of Christian Ethics*** Paulist Press

Tymms, Jenny 2017 ***Deep Work Spiritual Practice in our Workday World*** MediaCom

Andrews, Dave 2006 ***Compassionate Community Work*** Piquant Editions

St. Bernard of Clairvaux 2016 ***On the Love of God*** Gideon House Books

Smith, L, Martin 1998 ***Love Set Free Meditations on the Passion According to St John*** Cowley Publications

Moore, Thomas 1992 ***Care of the Soul A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Scaredness In Everyday Life*** Harper Perennial

Lou Redding, Mary 2012 ***Prayers for Life's Ordinary and Extraordinary Moments*** Upper Room Books

International Committee on English in the Liturgy 1994 ***The Psalter*** Liturgy Training Publications

Leunig, Michael 1990 ***A Common Prayer*** Collins Dove

The Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia 2005 ***Uniting in Worship 2*** MediaCom

Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 2012 ***God Is On The Cross Reflections On Lent and Easter*** Westminster John Knox Press


Bonhoeffer, Dietrich 1955 ***Ethics*** SCM Press

O'Donohue, John 2007 ***Benedictus*** Bantam Press

Voluntary Assisted Dying Response report to Vic—Tas Synod 2019

Faith, Worship and Ministry Task Force on Physician Assisted Dying The General Synod of The Anglican Church of Canada 2018 ***In Sure and Certain Hope Resources to Assist Pastoral and Theological Approaches to Physician Assisted Dying***

Mackinlay, Elizabeth 2022 ***End of life care: a pastoral approach to dying in the light of the Queensland Legislation on Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD)*** Workshop Presentation



Mannix, Kathryn 2021 ***Difficult conversations  
need preparation and ‘tenderness’***

Posted Thursday 4 November 2021

Burgess, Ruth ***Saying Goodbye Resources for funerals,  
scattering ashes and remembering***

Dowrick, Stephanie ***Heaven on Earth Timeless prayers  
of wisdom and love***

Singer, Peter 2016 ***Ethics in the Real World***

Textpublishing.com.au

*“The experience of pain, suffering and the end-of-life is a vulnerable experience. We are called to participate in and witness to God’s mission of compassionate care of the sick, dying, the poor in spirit, those who are experiencing brokenness and forsakenness.”*

**Final Report Voluntary Assisted Dying Queensland Synod 2019**

*The experience of pain,  
suffering and the end-of-life  
is a vulnerable experience.*





The United Church in Australia  
QUEENSLAND SYNOD



UnitingCare