

## **Letter – Voluntary Assisted Dying**

COVID-19 has reminded us that as a global community and as a society we are all interconnected, interdependent and interrelated. It has also reminded us of the importance of our vision and values for our society. As a nation, we have made the decision to prioritise the health and well-being of people and the protection of the most vulnerable while restricting and limiting our freedom and with great economic costs. Underlying this is a vision of the shape of society that we want to uphold. We have chosen to limit our freedom for the sake of upholding the values and shape of a society that we maintain to be of critical importance.

In Queensland we have been engaged in a long process of discussing the issue of voluntary assisted dying. Too often this debate has been focused on the right of people to choose how and when we die. The argument is often framed as voluntary assisted dying is an individual choice. In a liberal democracy, no one has a right, because of their religious or other views, to prevent an individual from accessing voluntary assisted dying.

Voluntary assisted dying is a much bigger issue than about our right to choose when and how to die. What is at stake with voluntary assisted dying is the shape and values of the society that we want to uphold. Our discussion of voluntary assisted dying represent society's value and understanding of a range of issues such as autonomy, dignity, vulnerability, suffering and worth. It is not simply a matter of choice or rights. If voluntary assisted dying is legislated then this shapes societies view of intrinsic worth and value of people at every stage of life in every circumstance of life. The risk is that it changes society's view of the value of human life, and that the most vulnerable, either through age or physical or mental ill health, see their life as of decreased value.

The Uniting Church in Australia, Queensland Synod made the following statement at its last Synod meeting in 2019 in opposition to voluntary assisted dying.

“We seek 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.”

COVID-19 has brought us an opportunity to rethink the shape and values of our society. When we are discussing voluntary assisted dying it is of critical importance that we recognise that this is not an issue about choice, but about our vision of a flourishing society.

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