



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC BISHOPS CONFERENCE

Document helps those accompanying Catholics considering euthanasia

MEDIA RELEASE

November 27, 2023

Australia's Catholic bishops have released a new document to guide priests, chaplains and pastoral workers who are asked to provide pastoral support to Catholics who are considering euthanasia.

The publication of the document, *To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope*, follows the legalisation of euthanasia in all Australian states.

Archbishop Peter A Comensoli, chair of the Bishops Commission for Life, Family and Public Engagement, said the Church has been confronted with the difficult question of how to attend to the spiritual and pastoral needs of Catholics contemplating euthanasia.

The focus of the priest or pastoral worker is on providing patients with God's grace and mercy.

"To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope is particularly timely given the many enquiries bishops have received from chaplains for guidance and the fact that euthanasia is available throughout the country," said Archbishop Comensoli.

"It is vital that chaplains and pastoral workers have the information to confidently respond to the realities that are facing them as they minister to Catholics in hospitals, in aged care and in their own homes."

In preparing the document, the bishops consulted widely with a range of people including theologians, ethicists, liturgists and medical doctors. The bishops have also worked with the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith.

The document points out that "Catholic teaching on euthanasia flows from our understanding of the human person".

"Euthanasia contradicts the goodness and dignity of each human person, created in the image of God – a unique, irreplaceable individual," it says.

"Accompanying someone who is expressing a desire for euthanasia is an act of charity that should be offered in a way that does not require the pastoral companion to suspend their firm commitment to the Church's clear teaching that euthanasia is never morally permissible."

The document points out that "... the tension between *supporting a person* in contrast to *supporting their actions* is very familiar to family members, especially spouses, parents and siblings. However, family members should strive to remain faithful to each other despite the disagreements and tensions that arise."

The document carefully outlines the circumstances in which people can receive sacraments, with the presumption being that the person is acting in good faith.

"By accompanying a person and listening to their griefs, fears and sufferings, as well as offering the Prayers of the Dead after death, we can share with them (and their family) the love of Christ without condoning any choice to intentionally end their life," the document says.

A copy of *To Witness and to Accompany with Christian Hope* can be found here:

<https://bit.ly/WitnessandAccompany>