

Dear Greg

May I please thank you for publishing the responses from Father Quinn, Rev Ken Wright and Emma Fradd, following the article The Recorder March 10 2009, "Local man helps form euthanasia campaign." - the launch of the group Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia.

The subject of Voluntary Euthanasia is a very important social issue and worthy of informed and critical debate. Quite frankly I am disappointed in the level of discussion by opponents of VE to this stage. Could we please deal with some FACTS rather than platitudes?

May I first define Euthanasia in the context Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia are looking to have legalised ?

Voluntary Euthanasia, is the right of an individual to choose a painfree, peaceful and dignified death, when the individual has no prospect of quality of a life with either dignity or purpose ahead of them. **It applies either in a terminal illness** eg the latter stages of cancer, **particularly in the approx 5% of cases where palliative care is not effective, or a hopeless illness**, eg Motor Neurone disease, where the patient's only prognosis is slow, lingering death, usually due to choking as muscles lose their capacity to enable the person to swallow. While the action of voluntary euthanasia would still result in grief for the bereaved, this grief is greatly relieved by the knowledge that the person they loved dearly did not have to suffer unnecessarily.

Currently the only legal option for a person with a terminal or hopeless illness who decides they have reached the stage of having no future except "life" as a vegetable, or endless pain, is suicide. In that case not only do they have the terminal illness, but they are forced to die by themselves in a totally unloved environment, by drinking weed killer, driving a car into a tree, shooting oneself, refusing to eat, etc. Having the legal option of VE enables an individual with the same terminal illness to die peacefully surrounded by love and compassion.

Father Leon Quinn states voluntary euthanasia is a violation of the Fifth Commandment. He appears to define this as "You must not kill", an instruction given by the Lord to Moses in the Christian Bible, Old Testament. My response to this is to quote another command from the Lord to Moses about 100 pages further on in the Bible, Numbers 31.7-9 and 31.17 and 18, which reads -

They did battle against Midian, as the Lord had commanded Moses, and killed every male. They killed the kings of Midian....and they also killed Balaam son of Beor with the sword. The Israelites took the women of Midian and their little ones captive; and they took all their cattle, their flocks and all their goods as booty....[Moses said] "Now therefore, kill every male among the little ones, and kill every woman who has known a man by sleeping with him. But all the young girls who have not known a man by sleeping with him, keep them alive for yourselves." (NRSV) Yes, dear readers, this is NOT part of what was taught in Sunday School!

All readers would be familiar with the story of Noah and the Ark, and the rather cute part where all the animals file two by two to safety in the Ark with Noah and his family. How many of us actually contemplate the other more distressing side of this story - the fact that God saw fit to DROWN every other living man, woman and child and baby on the earth as it was known then. (Genesis 7.23)

Father Quinn states medical professionals “pledge to do no harm”. Actually this section of the pledge is “As to diseases, make a habit of two things – to help, or at least to do no harm.” The complete sentence gives the pledge a totally different meaning!

He also says it would “open the floodgates to make it easier to kill people”. Again, this statement is totally unsupported in fact.

Voluntary Euthanasia has now been legal in Oregon, USA for ten years. In Oregon they call it Death with Dignity and it is also referred to as Physician Assisted Dying. The recent 2008 Report and other Reports show -

- No evidence of abuse or coercion, particularly of elderly or those with disability.
- Oregon now has best palliative care system in US – a win/win situation.
- Very low incidence of use, no “slippery slope”, no opening of “floodgates”.
- The safeguards, with severe penalties if not complied with, are working well.
- The availability of VE, although not often used, gives great peace of mind to those with a terminal illness, knowing mercy is available if needed.

The results after 10 years are so impressive and conclusive that in October 2008 the American Public Health Association (APHA) adopted a policy supporting death with dignity for terminally-ill patients after a review of Oregon’s ten year old law which demonstrated that aid- in- dying has ‘posed no harm to patients, vulnerable populations, or physicians’. APHA is now the fourth and largest major national medical association to adopt this position. The others are the American College of Legal Medicine, the American Medical Students' Association, and the American Medical Women's Association.

Washington State in a recent referendum, voted to adopt similar legislation to that in Oregon. This leads me into my reply to the letter to the Editor by Rev Ken Wright on behalf of the Port Pirie Ministers’ Association which states unequivocal opposition to VE or Dignity with Dying under any circumstances.

In Washington State, as far back as 1991, **176 members of the Clergy joined to support a YES vote for Death with Dignity.** We have Rev Martin Evans stating, “Thirty years in the ministry has given me first hand knowledge of many dying persons. We ministers and rabbis spend enormous time with our dying parishioners and often become intermediaries between patient and physician. **I know just how important it is to amend the law to permit dying patients to make their own choice**”

Rev Dr Bruce Parker agrees, “It is the intention of Initiative 119 (Death with Dignity ballot) to make it possible for the person near death to make the passage from life to death without pain, suffering and humiliation. **Theological consistency with our valuation of the worth of life leads to our appreciation of Initiative 119**”

Rev. Dale Turner, a co-chair of the Group states “**All thoughtful and caring people would agree that everything possible should be done to help the ill, for all have the right to live. However, there is a right to die as well as a right to live. The right to die is often violated by officious, prolonged, painful and expensive medical interventions that keep alive people who would be better off dead, since they are in agony or are living vegetables without hope of recovery**”.

I leave it to the Recorder readers to decide which approach they consider more caring and compassionate for a fellow human dying with unrelievable suffering - the views of the Port Pirie Ministers, or those of the Oregon Ministers 176 member group!!

May I conclude with a reference to the very distressing case of Chantal Sebire? I would hope that you, as Editor, can find space to print this article in its entirety. I have seen strong men and women moved to tears by this story. Imagine if this poor woman was part of our Port Pirie Community? What are our feelings of love and compassion for Chantal?

Finally, I urge all readers who support our campaign to ensure the choice of legal VE, with rigid safeguards, for those with a terminal or hopeless illness, to **please write or email me now with that support**. Together we can get our Members of Parliament to change the law. There are no costs involved to be part of our Group – it is not a fundraising exercise. Non Christians are also welcome!

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