



The Bishop of Norwich
The Rt Revd Graham Usher

 THE CHURCH
OF ENGLAND
Diocese of Norwich

23rd October 2024

To all clergy and parishioners in the Diocese of Norwich

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ

As Parliament prepares to debate assisted suicide, we wanted to share our thoughts on the matter. We know that this topic is hugely emotive and, as the media turn their attention to conversations in Parliament, we will naturally find our memories turning to times we've spent with loved ones in their final weeks, days and moments. Clergy and lay ministers will also have accompanied and prayed with people preparing for death, and supported families facing choices about medical care. If any of us can offer pastoral support around this and related issues, please do be in touch.

Not all of us in the Diocese of Norwich will agree on this matter. As a society we talk about death so little and it would be natural if you are still weighing this issue in your mind, even feeling pulled one way and then the other. Personally, we have reflected on our own pastoral experiences, and listened to medical staff. We have found the experience of other countries where laws have been introduced to be deeply concerning. Bishop Graham also spent two years working ecumenically on this topic with the International Commission for Anglican Orthodox Theological Dialogue. This resulted in a joint agreed statement [*Dying Well, Living Well: Our Sure and Certain Hope*](#).

As a result of our prayerful reflection, we are deeply concerned by the move to legalise assisted suicide. Such concern echoes the General Synod which has twice voted, with a significant majority, against the legalisation of assisted suicide ([2012](#) and [2022](#)). Our opposition is grounded in a concern for the welfare of the most vulnerable in society - for the widow, the orphan and the stranger – for the elderly, those seen as, or who perceive themselves to be, 'a burden' on family or society, those living in poverty, those whose disability puts them at risk, and those in coercive relationships.

Progressing the Private Member's Bill with such speed, and after no pre-legislative deep dive looking at the complexity of this issue, is troubling. Bishop Graham will seek to oppose its introduction when it comes to the House of Lords for scrutiny.

In this diocese we are blessed with outstanding community palliative care teams and other medical professionals, as well as those who care for people at Tapping House, Priscilla Bacon Lodge and the East Anglia Children's Hospice. We believe that good end of life care must be adequately funded by Government and not be as reliant on charitable sources.

Please do talk about these issues, read about them and, of course, pray about all of this. We have included a list of potential resources below. If you find yourself, like us, deeply concerned, **we would urge you to write to your local Member of Parliament expressing your thoughts**. Contact details are available on all MPs' websites.

Regardless of where your deliberation takes you, please know that we are praying for you: praying that as we consider what it means to minister to the sick and to prepare the dying for their death, we would better know the God who accompanies us through death and into new life.

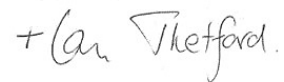
With all good wishes and every blessing,



Bishop of Lynn



Bishop of Norwich



Bishop of Thetford

Further Resources

A Guide to Terminology

1. [David Albert Jones, Defining the Terms of the Debate](#)

Overviews of assisted suicide:

1. [Anscombe Centre for Bioethics](#)
2. [Care Not Killing](#)
3. [Living and Dying Well](#)

Podcasts

1. [Lydia Dugdale, The Lost Art of Dying](#)
2. [Brian Brock, Theology, Euthanasia and Autism](#)

Further theological reflection

1. John Swinton and Richard Payne, [Living Well and Dying Faithfully](#)
2. John Wyatt, [Dying Well](#)