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New Zealand

Dear People

The Health Select Committee has received a petition requesting "That the House of Representatives investigate fully public attitudes towards the introduction of legislation which would permit medically-assisted dying in the event of a terminal illness or an irreversible condition which makes life unbearable."

Because the petition asks for a change to existing law, the Committee is undertaking an investigation into ending one's life in New Zealand. The Committee will investigate:

1. The factors that contribute to the desire to end one's life.
2. The effectiveness of services and support available to those who desire to end their own lives.
3. The attitudes of New Zealanders towards the ending of one's life and the current legal situation.
4. International experiences.

The Health Select Committee is seeking submissions on the four points above.

I strongly urge you to consider making a submission, as a concerned individual. It is important that we have large numbers of individual submissions. In addition you may wish to contribute to a group submission.

The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference statement "Euthanasia and Care of the Dying" is provided with this letter, and a booklet called "Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide: Myths and Facts" will soon be delivered to parishes. The booklet is a resource to help Catholics take part in the general debate, and to counter some of the prevailing views on euthanasia and assisted suicide. The booklet contains secular arguments against the desirability of euthanasia and assisted suicide. Underneath such secular arguments, of course, is the prohibition of the fifth commandment - thou shalt not kill - against the taking of innocent life. Our faith tells us that God is the Author of human life whose length remains in His hands.

Your submission can be just a few lines in the form of letter, or it can be more lengthy. Don't be afraid to draw on your personal experiences and stories, as they provide valuable insights to the Committee. There is provision to keep such submissions private if you let the clerk of the Committee know this when you send in your submission.

The committee requires two copies of each submission. If you wish to appear before the committee to speak to your submission you should state this clearly and provide a daytime telephone contact number. Your email address should also be provided if you have one. The deadline for submissions is 1 February 2016.

As we say in our statement, true compassion calls for us all to stand alongside, and in solidarity with, all those who are suffering. So many people, many Catholics included, already do so much to care for people who are sick, elderly or disabled as well as those who are dying. We don't need euthanasia or assisted suicide; we need good palliative care. The mark of a great society is evidenced in its ability to care for those who are most vulnerable.

Yours sincerely

† Barry Jones

Bishop of Christchurch