



FROM CARDINAL VINCENT NICHOLS AND ALL THE BISHOPS OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Pastoral Letter on the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill

To be read at all Masses on 5th and 6th April 2025

Fifth Sunday of Lent

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

I wish to speak with you today about the process in which our Parliament is currently considering legalising assisted suicide through the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill. As I have made clear earlier in this debate, as Catholics we have maintained a principled objection to this change in law recognising that every human life is sacred, coming as a gift of God and bearing a God-given dignity. We are, therefore, clearly opposed to this Bill in principle, elevating, as it does, the autonomy of the individual above all other considerations.

The passage of the Bill through Parliament will lead to a vote in late April on whether it progresses further. This will be a crucial moment and I, together with all the Bishops of England and Wales, am writing to ask your support in urging your MP to vote against this Bill at that time.

There are serious reasons for doing so. At this point we wish not simply to restate our objections in principle, but to emphasise the deeply flawed process undergone in Parliament thus far. We wish to remind you that it is a fundamental duty of every MP to ensure that legislation is not imposed on our society which has not been properly scrutinised and which will bring about damaging consequences.

The Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill will fundamentally change many of the key relationships in our way of life: within the family, between doctor and patient, within the health service. Yet there has been no Royal Commission or independent inquiry ahead of its presentation. It is a Private Member's Bill. The Bill itself is long and complex and was published just days before MPs voted on it, giving them inadequate time to consult or reflect upon it. The time for debate was minimal. The Committee examining the Bill took only three days of evidence: not all voices were heard, and it comprises an undue number of supporters of the Bill. In short, this is no way to legislate on such an important and morally complex issue.

One consequence of this flawed process is that many vital questions remain unanswered. Can MPs guarantee that the scope of the Bill will not be extended? In almost every country where assisted suicide has been introduced the current scope is wider than was originally intended. What role, if any, will the judiciary have in the process? We were told that judicial oversight was a necessary and vital part of the process; now we are told it isn't needed at all. What will protect the vulnerable from coercion, or from feeling a burden on family? Can the National Health Service cope with assisted suicide or will it, as the Health Secretary has warned, cause cuts elsewhere in the NHS? Can MPs guarantee that no medical practitioner or care worker would be compelled to take part in assisted suicide? Would this mean the establishment of a 'national death service'?

In contrast to the provisions of this Bill, what is needed is first-class, compassionate palliative care at the end of our lives. This is already provided to many in our society but, tragically, is in short supply and underfunded. No-one should be dispatched as a burden to others. Instead, a good society would prioritise care for the elderly, the vulnerable, and the weak. The lives of our families are richer for cherishing their presence.

It is sad reflection on Parliament's priorities that the House of Commons spent far more time debating the ban on fox hunting than it is spending debating bringing in assisted suicide.

I am sure that you will share these concerns. It is now clear that this measure is being rushed without proper scrutiny and without fundamental questions surrounding safeguards being answered. This is a deeply flawed Bill with untold unintended consequences.

Every MP, and Government, has a solemn duty to prevent such legislation reaching the statute book. This, tragically, is what may happen. So I appeal to you: even if you have written before, please make contact now with your MP and ask them to vote against this Bill not only on grounds of principle but because of the failure of Parliament to approach this issue in an adequate and responsible manner.

In his Letter to the Philippians, from which we heard in the Second Reading, St Paul reflects on the difficulties and responsibilities of life. He speaks of 'pressing on' and 'striving' for the fulness of life promised in Christ Jesus. Yet he is totally confident in his struggles because, as he says, 'Christ Jesus has made me his own'.

We too have many struggles. We too know that Christ Jesus has made us his own. So we too press on with this struggle, so important in our times.

May God bless you all.

+ Vincent Cardinal Nichols Archbishop of Westminster

+ Mark Bishop of Shrewsbury together with all the Bishops of England and Wales



April 2025

Dear Father,

We are writing to you concerning the upcoming Third Reading vote on Kim Leadbeater's Assisted Suicide Bill, expected to occur on Friday 25th April. We are writing to you jointly because of our shared interest in human rights and protecting the right to a decent life for disabled and older people. We have a very important ask for you.

But first, we want to thank you for the actions you have taken already to help mobilise opposition to this proposed change to the law, which would have severe consequences for many in our society. Although the Bill passed its Second Reading late last year, the vote was much closer than many anticipated.

The Independent has reported that at least 36 MPs who supported the Bill did so only to facilitate further discussion, or expressed reservations indicating they might not support it at the Third Reading. Since then, several other MPs have indicated they are reconsidering their positions and may vote against the Bill at Third Reading.

With the vote passing previously by a margin of just 55, only 28 MPs would need to reconsider their stance for the Bill to be defeated. Clearly, defeating this Bill at Third Reading is within reach.

Our nation stands at a crucial juncture regarding how we value human life, particularly the lives of people in the most vulnerable situations. If this significant proposal to introduce assisted suicide becomes law, thousands of individuals will be placed at risk in the coming years.

Mounting evidence from the small number of places around the world that have legalised assisted suicide shows that these laws are incremental, that safeguards do not work, and that the changed law can have devastating consequences.

It is, therefore, imperative that this Assisted Suicide Bill is defeated at Third Reading.

Both of us have spoken to several MPs, and colleagues agree that one of the most effective ways to persuade MPs to oppose this dangerous Bill is through physical letters or postcards from constituents asking them to vote "no" to the Bill. This is borne out from our own experience, serving in both Houses of Parliament over the past four decades.

Not Dead Yet UK, a network of disabled people who oppose legalising assisted suicide, has very helpfully arranged for the **enclosed postcards to be printed and distributed throughout the UK**. These postcards present evidence-based reasons to oppose assisted suicide, urging MPs to vote against the Bill at Third Reading.

If these postcards are sent to your local MP in substantial numbers, we know they will have a genuinely significant impact. We sincerely hope you will feel able to encourage those who share our concerns about this Bill to use them in making clear their opposition to the legislation.

The team at *Not Dead Yet UK* has worked extremely hard to get the postcards out to parishes. They have expressed the fear that their cards sit at the back of churches and that few will get sent to MPs.

To ensure these have as big an impact as possible, we would entreat you to ensure all of your parishioners receive a postcard and understand that they need to urgently send it to their MP in good time before the vote later this month.

To help make this a success, could we please encourage you to take both of the following steps:

1. Arrange for someone to either hand these postcards directly to all parishioners after Mass or ensure they are placed in the pews of your church.
2. Ask your parishioners from the pulpit to urgently send these postcards to their MP.

We only have days left to stop this terrible change to our laws - but we know that if parish priests around the country take action to ensure their parishioners send these postcards, then MPs will receive tens of thousands of them. This will make a profound difference.

Thank you very much indeed for your help and support at this critical moment.

Yours sincerely,

David Alton. Jane Campbell

Lord David Alton and Baroness Jane Campbell