



A Statement on the General Election of 2024

By Rt. Rev. Mark Davies, Bishop of Shrewsbury

An election is a moment of a choice. On 4th July, we are asked to choose a candidate to represent us in Parliament. In this choice, Catholics freely adopt different political viewpoints always informed by the faith we share. These are matters of legitimate difference of opinion as we acknowledge that there are different ways of addressing the challenges of our time. The Bishops Conference of England and Wales has provided reflections and resources on issues of public policy which can be found on the national website. However, there are some choices which our elected representatives will be called upon to make which touch upon the moral foundations of our society.

I write to draw your attention to one of these choices in 2024 which involves euthanasia: the medical killing of the sick and aged which is sometimes called assisting their suicide or even assisted dying, though it is not helping the dying in the way our Christian inheritance has taught. At least one party leader has indicated that he will proactively make parliamentary time available for a change in the law to be considered that will remove many of the legal safeguards which have long protected some of the most vulnerable members of our society. Amid the many questions of policy being considered in the weeks ahead, this must surely be a central issue.

The sanctity of human life transcends party politics because it impacts upon the moral foundations of our life together. Opening the doors to euthanasia would change the medical and nursing professions in their relationship to the sick and the aged; distort the way the sick and the elderly are viewed in society when it is less costly to kill rather than to care; put intolerable pressures on the sick and the aged who are made to feel a burden; and advance a culture of death which has extended to more and more people in countries where euthanasia has been adopted, even extending to the mentally ill and to children. In a letter to the faithful on the Island Guernsey where the threat of euthanasia arose, Bishop Philip Egan of Portsmouth (well-known to many in this Diocese) sets out briefly and cogently what is at stake “Your Life and Your Well-being are Under Threat” (*letter attached*).

In making your choice on 4th July I would ask you to raise this question with the candidates who seek your support. If candidates are not easily contactable, then the *Right to Life* website may help: righttolife.org.uk May our choice be made in the light of the sanctity of human life.

5th June 2024

Enc: Bishop Philip Egan letter to the clergy, religious and faithful of the Parish of Guernsey - 8th April 2024 (pdf)

TO THE CLERGY, RELIGIOUS AND FAITHFUL OF THE PARISH OF GUERNSEY

SOLEMNITY OF THE ANNUNCIATION, 8TH APRIL 2024

YOUR LIFE AND YOUR WELL-BEING ARE UNDER THREAT

Bishop Philip Egan wrote this letter to Catholics in Guernsey on the Feast of the Annunciation.

First of all, I wish you a very Happy Easter. I wish you many graces and blessings from the Lord. The death and resurrection of Christ gives us hope for our lives here on earth and the promise of eternal life with God in heaven.

I write because dark clouds are threatening the beautiful island of Guernsey. The Lord's death and resurrection remind us of two fundamental moral truths: 'Thou shalt not kill' (Ex 20: 13) and 'Love thy neighbour as thyself' (Mk 12: 31). These are commandments Jesus taught in His life on earth and of which He gave us a wonderful example. These commandments, 'Thou shalt not kill' and 'Love thy neighbour as thyself,' form the bedrock not only of Jewish and Christian morality; they are the teaching of all religions. More, they are instinctive principles written into every human heart and they ground the laws governing every civilised society on earth. Yet there are now dark forces at work in Guernsey in the media and public life actively seeking to undermine these principles. I refer here to the campaign to legalise euthanasia, or mercy-killing, and assisted suicide. (I don't use the term 'assisted dying.' I call it by the name of what it actually is: suicide).

ASSISTED SUICIDE IS GRAVELY WRONG FOR AT LEAST FOUR REASONS

First, it places an intolerable and immoral demand on medical staff, doctors and nurses. It asks them to ignore the Hippocratic Oath they take to preserve life, in order to extinguish life. Many a vet will speak of their grief at putting down a beloved family pet – “putting it out of its misery” - yet surely we cannot treat an elderly relative in the same way? Assisted suicide would place medics in an impossible dilemma. It would ultimately undermine the trust we place in them. How would we know any more whether the doctor is working in our best interests?

Secondly, to legalise euthanasia and assisted suicide would undermine palliative care and the work of care-homes. After all, it is easier and cheaper to kill someone than to care for them. Yes, frailty, pain and infirmity are a difficult trial and the terminally ill can experience despair. Yet, thanks be to God for the amazing advances medical science has made. Britain is a leader in palliative care with methods and drugs that can manage pain right to the end. The Church always works to relieve suffering but as a Christian, I would add that in union with Christ, it is possible to find from Him all the patience and energy we need to sustain suffering – to 'carry the cross' (Mt 16: 24) - and to turn it into a positive good for others. This is the meaning of Easter, when Jesus underwent death at the hands of those who had decided it was better for society to have Him extinguished.

Thirdly, the possibility of assisted suicide puts intolerable pressure on the sick and the elderly. It makes them feel they are a burden on their family and a financial burden. Yet when we love someone, efficiency and cost-saving is irrelevant. How can helping someone to commit suicide ever be compassionate? It is evil masquerading as a kindness. As one of your Deputies said recently in the news paper: “Considerable savings could be realised if assisted dying was to be introduced here in the island”. Seeking to justify himself, he added “Many people don't want to keep on living, and I think we need to put a figure on that.”

And fourthly, as in Belgium and elsewhere where assisted suicide and euthanasia have been legalised, the legislation gradually keeps creeping forward, expanding to cover more and more categories: sick children, people with autism, those with dementia, the depressed, the mentally ill, the handicapped and others whose lives someone else decides are not worth living. In Canada, almost 5% of deaths are now by lethal injection. Recently, I read about a Canadian doctor boasting that she had helped hundreds and hundreds of people to die: she said it was the “most rewarding work she had ever done.” This is chilling stuff.

I write to you now because your local politicians and pressure groups are raising the question of legalising assisted suicide and this is likely to gather momentum in the next few months before the formal election campaigns begin. I want to appeal to all people of common sense and good will to reject these alarming proposals, and to redouble the compassionate care of those who are terminally ill. Let there be no death -clinics in Guernsey. Don't let Guernsey become a destination for suicide tourism. The right to die would inevitably become the duty to die - and the right to make another die.

I appeal to Catholics to mobilise. Don't be persuaded by emotional pitches in the media. Speak out against this sinister proposal. Raise it with the candidates in the forthcoming elections. It is never permissible to use an means to do good. Suicide is a mortal sin and helping someone commit suicide is a mortal sin. For we believe in assisted living, not assisted dying. Death is not pain relief; it is the transition to a glorious new life in heaven with God our Father and Creator.

In Corde Iesu,

+Philip Bishop of Portsmouth