

Submissions to be made to:

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By Rev Paul Cark – Minister – Redcliffe Uniting Church. Not on behalf of the congregation but after discussion with members of the congregation with experience, expertise and an interest in the area.

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VAD

Preliminaries.

Thank you for your work on this. I have the previous Chair of Palliative Care Qld in my congregation who thought it was an excellent document, well researched and balanced. The only thing missing was medical opinions.

Firstly – I would hope that the Uniting Church would be advocating that **the Qld State Govt does not move on VAD legislation until *after* the Royal Commission** into the Aged Care sector. While VAD is NOT part of that Royal Commission, the findings and recommendations of that Commission will speak into this space. Elder abuse, seniors dying from incompetence and misadventure. We already know we have a problem with the Elderly treated as second class citizens, as expendable, as a nuisance. If this is happening *before* VAD is brought in, the risk grows if VAD is made legal. We would do very well to head the finding of the Royal Commission to work into any future decisions in this space.

Submission Proper

1. Should the Synod adopt option 1.

Yes

Comments in support

I acknowledge the difficulty of this issue and don't give the above answer as a black and white pronouncement. I believe on the balance of the arguments – given our place in this space as an advocate of the voiceless and marginalised – we should err on the cautious side.

I concur that Scripture is a strong advocate for the **sanctity of life** which has been a revolutionary idea in human history. It has protected and empowered the exploited. But human societies quickly ignore this value.

We also don't believe in making such **sanctity into an idol** – where life must be maintained at all costs. We have now entered into a situation where we have long played god keeping people alive and prolonged their suffering.

The example of Jesus and the martyrs in Scripture, I believe, affirms the Ecclesiastical observation that, 'There is a time to die'. Ecc 3:2. Jesus' acceptance of the cross can never be misconstrued as suicide or VAD, but it does show us that there are things worth dying for. Christianity does not believe in life at all costs. Many disciples could have re-canted to save their lives but they put their lives in God's hands. A peaceful facing of death's inevitability, and the resurrections reality transforms how we face this *last enemy*.

I also believe that while extreme **suffering** is bad and to be avoided, the Scripture has a very different opinion of general suffering. Scripture sees suffering as redemptive. It is our human nature to understandably want to avoid all suffering, yet suffering, in healthy [even strong] doses is good for us. We know that to help the caterpillar out of the cocoon actually kills it. The struggle pumps blood into its unused wings enabling it to fly.

I have personally seen this metaphor be real for those facing death. They see the future journey to the grave and fear it. But the humility they learn, the dependence they have to allow [especially men who have been independent all their lives] has been cathartic and redemptive. A choice to end life early to avoid these things may be robbing us of the very thing we need in death. If end of life brings humility, I can think of no better way to meet our maker. As Joseph Campbell said, 'The cave we fear holds the treasure we seek.'

We also have a **duty of care to the vulnerable**. While many structures can be put in place to protect the vulnerable, I have also personally seen how the pressure from family, the unspoken assumptions of our culture, the persuasiveness of our own misaligned thinking can convince us that death is the best way out. It is the voiceless, the powerless, the unnoticed, the silent, the poor who are the potential victims of this legislation. This is our domain, our people. Yes, the very small number who suffer and meet the criteria for VAD are our people too, but there will be many places for them to have their needs met. As Joe Hildebrand points out, VAD is so logical, it's dangerous. <https://www.news-mail.com.au/news/euthanasia-is-logical-and-thats-why-it-should-neve/3532741/>

It is also **ageist** to treat the 24 year old seeking death differently from the 84 year old. I believe we should do what we would for a 24 year old, for an 84 year old who sees death as the answer. Will we show that equality.

2. Should the Synod adopt option 2.

No

Comments in support

As above. If VAD is made legal there will be more than enough public institutions to cater for the clientele. Even if some in our organisations felt it was appropriate, we don't need to do it. Are we suggesting we could do it better/differently to other institutions? I think that argument would have to be demonstrated. I also fear that in 30 years we'll be asking for a Royal Commission into

VAD, and it would be better for us to have our hands clean. The really scary part of VAD is that if there are any victims, they don't live to tell the story. That makes misuse of the system even more attractive.

3. Should the Synod adopt recommendations 1-5.

Yes

Comments in support

Especially advocating Palliative Care, Spiritual and Pastoral needs, and conscientious objection. It would also be excellent if VAD was seen as a very small late stage of the Palliative care process rather than an either/or process. I note that Palliative Care Qld do not see VAD as part of PC.

Thank you for your time and work.

Paul Clark [Rev]