



**PASTORAL LETTER ON THE TERMINALLY ILL ADULTS (END OF LIFE) BILL
FIFTH SUNDAY OF LENT - 5TH/6TH APRIL 2025**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Last November, in advance of the Second Reading in the House of Commons of the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill, I published a Pastoral Letter. In that Letter, I asked the clergy, religious and lay faithful of our diocese to unite in prayer and compassionate action to oppose the passage of the Bill. I know that many people in our diocese responded to this request and wrote to their Members of Parliament expressing their concerns and opposition to the Bill. I sincerely thank you for this.

Although a majority of MPs voted to allow the Bill to proceed to its next stage, it is clear that many of them did so only to allow further debate. I wish therefore to speak with you again today about the process in which our Parliament is currently considering legalising assisted suicide through this 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 into being as a gift of God and bearing a God-given dignity. We are, therefore, clearly opposed to this Bill out of a concern for the good of every person in society, the protection in law of all people, especially those who are at their most vulnerable, and the spiritual and pastoral care of the sick and dying.

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 asking for your support once more 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. It is a fundamental duty of every MP to ensure that legislation is not imposed on our society which they have not properly scrutinised and which, as a result, will have damaging consequences.

The Bill will fundamentally change many of the key relationships in our way of life: within the family, between doctor and patient, and 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 also minimal. Not all voices were heard: the Committee examining the Bill took only three days of evidence, comprising 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, palliative care specialists, and medical ethicists have warned, cause cuts elsewhere in the NHS – not least in end-of-life care? Can MPs guarantee that no medical practitioner or care worker would be compelled to take part in assisted suicide?

In contrast to the provisions of this Bill, what is needed is the highest quality, 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 end their life – or have their life ended - because they feel they are 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.

I am sure that you will share these concerns about how little time has been given to debating this issue in the House of Commons. It is now clear that this measure is being rushed through, 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.

✠ Marcus
Bishop of Leeds

Given at Leeds on 21st March 2025, and appointed to be read at celebrations of Mass, published through parish distribution systems, and made available to be taken away from the churches and chapels of the Diocese on Saturday 5th/Sunday 6th April 2025.

* The charity Right to Life UK has a simple online mechanism to help you contact your MP. It takes little more than a few minutes to input your postcode, make sure the suggested text suits your viewpoint and submit your message to ask your MP to stop assisted suicide being rushed into law. Go to the Right to Life UK website: <https://righttolife.org.uk/>