

Extract from the Minutes of the 44th Annual Meeting of the Synod of Western Australia



Uniting Church in Australia
Synod of Western Australia



A CHRISTIAN
COMMUNITY
FOR EVERYONE

September 2020

Voluntary Assisted Dying [Proposal 9] was amended and accepted by consensus.
[Resolution 26/2020]:

That the Synod:

1. Recognises the 2019 Synod affirmation that:
 - (a) life is a gift of God, and all human life, regardless of circumstance, is precious to and has dignity before God;
 - (b) 'neither death nor life, neither suffering nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (see Romans 8:38-39);
 - (c) as followers of Christ and through God's accompanying grace, gifts of fresh wisdom, peace, courage and compassion can be birthed in the midst of suffering, which is a deep and abiding mystery;
 - (d) 'while death is the end of mortal life it marks a new beginning in our relationship with God' (see *Uniting in Worship 2*; Funeral Liturgy);
 - (e) as followers of Christ we are called to spiritual discernment and responsibility as we journey through life and death;
 - (f) as the body of Christ we are called to be a loving and supportive community around people in need of care as they or their loved ones move closer to the end of mortal life;
 - (g) as citizens in a pluralistic culture we also seek to care for and respect our neighbours who may not hold to our faith in God yet may experience fear, uncertainty, pain, grief or sometimes, extreme and extended suffering, as they prepare for their own death or that of their loved ones; and
 - (h) multi-disciplinary palliative care is a vital service that can optimise the quality of life for someone who has an active, progressive, advanced disease, with little or no prospect of cure even as they move closer to their death;
2. Urges the WA Government to live up to its commitment to increased financial and practical support for the extension of quality palliative care services and better access across the state as announced during 2019 and beyond;
3. (a) Acknowledges again that within the Church there is a diversity of faithful Christian understandings and responses to dying and to 'voluntary assisted dying' which are consistent with the affirmations in clause 1; and we seek to live respectfully together in that tension;

- (b) Encourages its ministry agents, members and agencies to respect the freedom of people to hold different views with regard to the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act (WA) 2019 - ranging from conscientious objection to active endorsement;
 - (c) Requests its ministry agents, Elders and congregational or faith community pastoral carers to respect the right of any eligible person to explore, or take up the option of, voluntary assisted dying within the law, and to offer appropriate compassionate, emotional and spiritual support for such people; or if the caregiver is conscientiously or practically unable to offer support, that appropriate referral be made to another suitable caregiver;
 - (d) Requests its agencies to recognise the legal right of eligible people to seek voluntary assisted dying and to not impede any person's access to information about voluntary assisted dying or referral to services for support with voluntary assisted dying;
 - (e) Requests its agencies to determine their policies and procedures in relation to voluntary assisted dying in compliance with Western Australia's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2019 and reflective of the affirmations in clause 1, including offering compassionate, emotional and spiritual support for staff and for people seeking voluntary assisted dying. In the event that a caregiver is conscientiously or practically unable to offer support, that appropriate referral be made to another suitable caregiver;
4. (a) Notes the Report of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Task Group and their intention to prepare introductory resources to assist the Church, its agencies and members to engage in discussion and learning promoting deeper understanding about dying and other end-of-life matters including voluntary assisted dying;
- (b) asks the Task Group to provide opportunities for people of the Church and its agencies, schools and colleges to provide feedback on the resources and whether or not they would value further resourcing on a range of end-of-life matters including voluntary assisted dying;
- (c) Authorises an extension of up to six months for the Task Group to continue its work, under a revised title 'End-of-Life Care Task Group', with the oversight and support of the Synod Standing Committee;
- (d) Asks the Task Group to Report back to the Synod Standing Committee regarding responses received and to make any recommendation it sees fit about the establishment of a further Reference Group to develop broader and deeper resources regarding end-of-life matters for the benefit of the Church and our community.

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**POSTSCRIPT:** The Task Group subsequently prepared a resource booklet '*Conversations about the End-of-life*' which is available from the Uniting Church in Western Australia website (Resources). The Task Group was not able to complete other proposed tasks, and was disbanded. The Synod Standing Committee in 2021 asked Rev Ken Devereux to continue as a contact person for the time being. An updated Report was presented to the Presbytery of Western Australia in June 2021 and later to Synod 2021. Comments may be directed to E: [eol.care@wa.uca.org.au](mailto:eol.care@wa.uca.org.au)