



NSW.ACT

## Euthanasia Discussion Kit

### *Discussion Part Four: Preliminary Questions on Euthanasia and the Aged*

The document you are now reading is published because we want your help in preparing a paper on euthanasia and the aging.

Some people who are in favour of euthanasia, argue that simply being old and frail should be adequate reason to be allowed to ask for help in dying. Some advocates go further than this, arguing that the Aged are a drain on social and health resources and should choose not to live any longer. Even if they do not argue for involuntary euthanasia (where the doctor or society decides it is time they die), they are certainly putting pressure on older people to choose to die. Under such pressure, even "voluntary" euthanasia would not be truly voluntary - it would be the result of older people being made to feel that they are useless, not valuable, a burden on society.

The Euthanasia Study Group (ESG) intends to publish a paper which looks at the range of issues raised by this aspect of the debate about euthanasia, as part of its Discussion Kit on Euthanasia.

The Euthanasia Study Group would like to know people's views not on the question of euthanasia and the Aged.

---

### **Should euthanasia be available to the Aged?**

---

What is your response to the argument that euthanasia should be available, so that the Aged can choose it instead of becoming frail and "useless"?

If we do not allow euthanasia for people on the basis of age, how can society adequately care for people who are old and frail?

If we do allow euthanasia for people on the basis of age, what are the dangers and how can society protect older people from these dangers?

#### **The issues involved include the following:**

- ***The value of human life***  
In what sense is human life "sacred"? Is each individual human being valuable and if so, on what basis? In practical terms, as people grow old, what are the implications of saying human life is sacred and each individual human being is valuable?

Some people see aging as a dehumanising experience, which we should be allowed to avoid. Do you agree or disagree with this, and for what reason?

- ***Living worthwhile lives as older people***
  - a) Are we ever entitled to describe older human beings as "useless"? what does it mean to be useless or useful? is the solution to people feeling useless to kill them/encourage them to seek death, or is it to rethink their role in society and to find ways of enabling them to feel useful? If the latter, how can this be done effectively and appropriately?
  - b) What responsibility does society have to help the Aged live lives that they feel are worthwhile,

- i) when they are still capable of paid employment eg when they are 56 years old and unemployed; or
    - ii) when they are becoming physically frail and/or mentally impaired.
  - c) How can society fulfil its responsibility?
  - d) What contribution can the church (through congregations and through aged care services) make to helping the Aged live lives they feel are worthwhile, especially when they are becoming physically frail and/or mentally impaired ?
- **Adequate care**
    - a) What is the appropriate response to the economic rationalists who question health care spending on the Aged? What proportion of resources should go to caring for the Aged, and how can those resources be shared fairly and appropriately among them?
    - b) Are there health services provided to the elderly which are inappropriate? For example, is there too much intervention by doctors, or too much use of hospitals? Are there medical and hospital services which should be provided to younger people, but not to the very old? Why? At what age should this change in policy apply?
    - c) What is your age?
  - **Euthanasia**
    - a) Does there ever come a time when people should be able to say: I have lived long enough, help me die now? That is, should people be able to choose active euthanasia on the basis of their age, rather than a painful terminal illness? Why or why not?
    - b) There are a variety of arguments put forward in support of allowing the Aged to ask for euthanasia. Which of the arguments (if any) do you support? Which (if any) do you reject? Please give reasons.
    - c) If you are in favour of euthanasia on the basis of age, please indicate how you think this would operate. How would you protect older people who wanted to live rather than die.

### **Other issues**

There may be other issues you think are relevant. What are they? What comment do you want to make about them?

---

© **Copyright.** Uniting Church in Australia

This material is copyright. It is intended for your general use and information. You may download, store in cache, display, print and copy the information in unaltered form only. Uniting Church in Australia congregations, councils and agencies may copy and distribute the material, in unaltered form, for purposes consistent with being part of the Uniting Church in Australia. With this exception, you may not re-transmit, distribute, publish or commercialise the material without the permission of the UCA.