



## CATHOLIC BISHOPS' CONFERENCE OF ENGLAND AND WALES

### HAVING YOUR SAY ON 'ASSISTING SUICIDE'

**There is an important consultation now taking place about when cases of 'assisted suicide' will be prosecuted.** The law on 'assisting suicide' has not changed but the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) has issued 'interim guidelines' about when to prosecute people who do it. We have until 16 December 2009 to respond.

**It is essential that as many people as possible concerned about safeguarding the value of life should respond. The guidelines are defective. If left unchanged, they are likely to encourage attitudes and practices that will greatly increase the pressures on vulnerable people to kill themselves.** Suicide is a terrible act and typically the act of a desperate person. Those contemplating suicide should be treated with compassion, but suicide should never be promoted or assisted. Promoting or assisting suicide is a serious offence, not a 'victimless crime'. It leaves someone dead.

#### **What are the most important defects in the guidelines?**

First, that the guidelines give the impression that a person with a disability (or a serious illness or a history of suicide attempts) has less protection under the law than the rest of us. Second, they may well encourage people in certain categories (spouses and carers) to think they are immune from prosecution for advising or assisting suicide. Sadly, not all spouses and carers are caring people, and vulnerable people need the law's protection here. Third, the guidelines fail to give enough weight to preventing systematic promotion of suicide by pro-suicide and pro-euthanasia groups or individuals.

#### **What can we do?**

You can respond to the consultation and make your views known. Unfortunately the consultation document produced by the Crown Prosecution Service is confusing and not easy to follow. Advice on how to respond is on the Bishops' Conference website. If you write a response the key point to make in your reply is that the factors "against prosecution" should not include:

1. that the victim had a terminal illness, severe disability or chronic illness, or .
2. that the suspect was a spouse, partner or close relative.

It is right that there should be some discretion for the DPP when there are exceptional circumstances which mean prosecution would not be in the public interest. But including these key categories in guidelines could allow the practice of assisted suicide to quickly become very common.

To make your response go to [www.cps.gov.uk/consultations/as\\_policy.html](http://www.cps.gov.uk/consultations/as_policy.html) or phone the **Crown Prosecution Service (020 7796 8000)** and ask for a copy of the **consultation document**.

Advice on how to respond can be found on the Bishops' Conference website at [www.catholicchurch.org.uk](http://www.catholicchurch.org.uk)

30<sup>th</sup> Oct 2009