

## ONE COUPLE'S RESPONSE TO THE ASSISTED SUICIDE BILL

*One of our long-term parishioners, Pat Dishon, and her husband Brian, have written the letter below to their MSP, following on from the request of the Scottish Bishops in last week's Pastoral Letter. We offer their clear, articulate and strong convictions about a sensitive subject that divides many people in our country. And at the end of the letter, we add Pat's words of encouragement to parishioners to themselves write to their MSPs.*

Dear MSP (name given)

We are writing to ask that you vote against the upcoming Assisted Suicide Bill. It is not an Assisted Dying Bill – that is a misnomer. Assisted Dying is what the Hospice Movement does, and the palliative care given in our NHS. They support people, with terminal illnesses to have the best quality of life possible towards the end of their lives. Our NHS was set up all those years ago to provide care 'from the cradle to the grave' and now the Scottish Parliament has brought forward a proposal to opt out of that commitment. To the everlasting shame of the people of Scotland our Parliament is the only legislature, out of all the nations of the U.K., to even consider such a betrayal. All the other nations hold fast to the founding principles of the NHS. The Scottish Parliament has caused great anxiety among older people and those terminally ill that they will no longer be protected when at their most vulnerable.

The supporters of this Bill argue that it will give people control over their own dying. But we do not allow people suffering from depression or other mental health conditions to ask their doctor to prescribe something to help them commit suicide, even if another doctor agreed. This Bill is a minefield for doctors who take an oath 'To do no harm'. We understand that doctors will prescribe the suicide drug, but their patient will have to take it themselves. What about patient's families? How would they feel going into their loved one's home, or visiting them in hospital, to find that a doctor had been there before them and given their loved one a fatal dose to take without the family's knowledge? One can only imagine the possible law cases that could follow. We have seen many cases recently when votes taken in Parliament have been disputed and even overturned. An MSP who voted for this Bill could well be held responsible at a later date.

And all to what purpose? Everyone is entitled to caring ethical support from the NHS, even in these straightened times, we all need to know that we, and our loved ones, are safe. A caring Scottish Parliament would make it their prime aim to help provide that sense of security. Having cared for a parent with cancer in her own home, to the end, with the support of her G.P., we have no doubt that is what should always happen. We were also there when a brother was receiving palliative care in hospital by supportive doctors and nurses to a calm and dignified end. We have also witnessed the quite incredible care given to family members and friends in the Marie Curie Hospice and St. Columba's Hospice. That care is available to all – your responsibility, as MSPs, is surely to make sure that palliative care is fully funded – not to agree to pay for suicide drugs to be made freely available.

Who is likely to want to vote for a member of the Scottish Parliament who showed such a lack of commitment to supporting the dying knowing that next time you might be at their mercy...'

**Pat writes:** *'Parishioners can write, or e-mail, not just to their own constituency MSP but also to their List MSPs or indeed to as many MSPs as they wish. This Bill is on a free vote by each MSP (not linked to a political party). Politicians are in the numbers game. They will take into account how many people contact them stating that they are either for or against this Bill. It is crucial that you make your views known. You don't need to write a long letter or e-mail simply a few sentences asking the MSP to vote against this Bill. You can find the names and e-mail addresses of your constituency MSP and List MSPs online by typing - "Find Your MSPs" in your browser and this will take you to The Scottish Parliament website. Letters can just be sent directly to them at the Scottish Parliament.'*