Assisted Suicide Bill ‘fundamentally flawed’: say our bishops

Ireland’s Catholic bishops said on Thursday that a bill seeking to legalize assisted suicide is “fundamentally flawed.”

In a March 11 statement after their spring plenary meeting, the bishops declared that the Dying with Dignity Bill was “at odds with the common good.”

“This bill is fundamentally flawed. It cannot be repaired or improved and we call on Catholics to ask their elected representatives to reject it entirely,” they said.

The bill was presented to the Dáil Éireann, the lower house of the Oireachtas (Irish legislature), on Sept. 15, 2020. It seeks to allow doctors “to provide assistance to a qualifying person to end his or her own life.”

A “qualifying person” must be terminally ill, at least 18 years of age, resident in Ireland, and have “a clear and settled intention to end his or her own life,” expressed in a declaration.

The bishops offered an extensive critique of the bill in a Feb. 12 submission to the Oireachtas Committee on Justice.

In their new statement, the bishops said: “What this bill proposes may be appropriately described as ‘assisted suicide,’ because it involves one person taking his or her own life, with the active participation of another.”

“We believe that every life has an inherent value, which should be endorsed by society. This bill, if passed, would be a sad reflection of the unwillingness of society to accompany people with terminal illness. It would reflect a failure of compassion.”

In September 2020, the Vatican’s doctrinal congregation reaffirmed the Church’s perennial teaching on the sinfulness of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith spoke out as advocates of euthanasia and assisted suicide gained ground in parts of Europe.

Austria’s top court ruled in December 2020 that assisted suicide should no longer be a criminal offense, ordering the government to lift the prohibition in 2021.

Portugal’s parliament backed a bill approving euthanasia in January. If the bill is signed into law, Portugal will become the fourth country in Europe to legalize the practice, alongside the Netherlands, Belgium, and Luxembourg.

The Irish bishops said that while the Dying with Dignity Bill presented assisted suicide in terms of personal autonomy, it would have far-reaching consequences for society as a whole.

“Once it is accepted in principle that one person may participate actively in ending the life of another, there is no longer any logical basis for refusing this same option to any person who feels that life is no longer worth living,” they wrote.

“We are aware that, in countries where it is legally permitted for healthcare professionals to be directly involved in the taking of human life, it has very quickly been extended to include people who are not terminally ill.”

A bioethics institute noted last month that euthanasia and assisted suicide cases have risen rapidly

in Belgium and the Netherlands since the practices were legalized in 2002.

The Irish bishops said: “The bill anticipates that doctors and nurses, whose vocation and purpose is to serve life, will now be prepared to involve themselves in ending life. This would represent a radical transformation of the meaning of healthcare.”

“While the bill does, theoretically, provide for conscientious objection, it still requires healthcare professionals to refer their patients to other medical practitioners who will carry out their wishes.”

“This means that, one way or another, healthcare professionals are required to involve themselves in something which they believe to be contrary to morality and to medical best practice. This, in our view, is unacceptable.”

CNA