



# the nathaniel report 66

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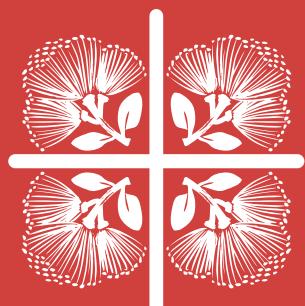
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# TE KUPENGA  
NATHANIEL  
CENTRE FOR  
BIOETHICS



The Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics was established in 1999 as an agency of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference. The key functions of The Nathaniel Centre include:

- developing educational opportunities in bioethics
- acting as an advisory and resource centre for individuals, and professional, educational and community groups
- carrying out research into bioethical issues, and promoting the study and practical resolution of ethical, social, cultural and legal challenges arising out of clinical practice and scientific research
- carrying out research and action to support the Church's pastoral response to bioethical issues taking into account the needs of different cultures and groups in society

## Our Philosophy

Rapid advances in science have moral, ethical, and spiritual implications at an individual and societal level. While Catholic bioethics deals with the same realities as secular bioethics we are committed to bringing the light of the Gospel and the wisdom from the Church's moral tradition to the various issues under discussion.

Reason and faith do not exist in isolation; they guide our individual and collective search for truth and they complement each other when they meet in genuine service of those who suffer. In the words of Pope Benedict XVI: "Only in charity, illumined by the light of reason and faith is it possible to pursue development goals that possess a more humane and humanising value." In this way the work of bioethics appears as a practical expression of the reverence we have for the gift of life.

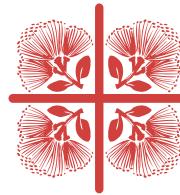
For The Nathaniel Centre the context of bioethics is pastoral, because the ethical issues arising in healthcare and the life sciences reflect the realities of people's lives.

**Faith and reason are like two wings on which the human spirit rises to the contemplation of truth...**

**POPE JOHN PAUL II**

**... faith consolidates, integrates and illuminates the heritage of truth acquired by human reason.**

**POPE BENEDICT XVI**



## IN THIS ISSUE...

Throughout his pontificate, Pope Francis has identified a need for the Church to remain centred on the act of accompaniment – being fully present and attentive to another on their pathway or hīkoi with their God.

In *Christus Vivit*, Pope Francis writes: "The Church will have to initiate everyone – priests, religious and laity – into this "art of accompaniment" which teaches us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (cf. Ex 3:5). The pace of this accompaniment must be steady and reassuring, reflecting our closeness and our compassionate gaze which also heals, liberates and encourages growth in the Christian life." (n. 169)

This issue focuses on the art of accompaniment – the art of hīkoi – that we are all called to.

## Hīkoi

### Areti Metuamate

You hīkoi on sacred ground  
Ground that has seen many things  
As have you  
It may feel so, but you do not hīkoi alone  
  
Even in the darkest moments  
When you wish not to be seen  
Even though you push others away  
Someone is always with you  
  
Whatever direction you take  
Or the reason you set out  
Remember, you can count on someone  
Right there for you  
Yes, you  
  
I pray that I may listen better  
To hear  
To see  
Your hīkoi  
And you  
  
I am not sure I'll understand  
But I know someone who will  
  
On your hīkoi  
If you let me  
I will keep you company too  
And pray for you  
And love you  
All the way through

*Dr Areti Metuamate (Ngāti Kauwhata, Ngāti Raukawa, Ngāti Hauā) is the former CEO of Te Kupenga and is currently working in tertiary education in Australia.*

Find us on

# Reflections on the Art of Accompaniment

"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them ..." (Luke 24: 13-15)

"[W]e need a church capable of walking at people's side, of doing more than simply listening to them; a church that accompanies them on their journey; a church able to make sense of the 'night' contained in the flight of so many of our brothers and sisters from Jerusalem ... Jesus warmed the hearts of the disciples of Emmaus." (Pope Francis addressing the Bishops of Brazil, World Youth Day 2013)

"Since the creation of human beings, God has communicated his love through a relationship with humanity ... The Old and New Testament reveal the Trinitarian God to be a God who accompanies ... In the relationship of accompaniment, the marginalized are provided a space in which they can come to deeply know the love of Jesus Christ through friendship, guidance, and authenticity with a mentor." (*The Art of Accompaniment* – <https://www.catholicapostolatcenter.org/art-of-accompaniment.html>)

"For the Church's pastors are not only responsible for promoting Christian [truth], but also the 'pastoral discernment of the situations of a great many who no longer live this reality. Entering into pastoral dialogue with these persons is needed to distinguish elements in their lives that can lead to a greater openness to the Gospel ... in its fullness'" (*Amoris Laetitia* n. 293)

"God's indulgent love always accompanies our human journey; through grace, it heals and transforms hardened hearts, leading them back to the beginning through the way of the cross."

(*Amoris Laetitia* n. 62)

"It is important that the divorced who have entered a new union should be made to feel part of the Church. 'They are not excommunicated' and they should not be treated as such, since they remain part of the ecclesial community. These situations 'require careful discernment and respectful accompaniment. Language or conduct that might lead them to feel discriminated against should be avoided, and they should be encouraged to participate in the life of the community. The Christian community's care of such persons is not to be considered a weakening of its faith and testimony to the indissolubility of marriage; rather, such care is a particular expression of its charity'." (*Amoris Laetitia* n. 243)

"Listening calls for three distinct and complementary kinds of sensitivity. The first is a matter of listening to some-one who is sharing their very self ... The other person must sense that I am listening unconditionally, without being offended or shocked, tired, or bored. We see an example of this kind of listening in the Lord; he walks alongside the disciples on the way to Emmaus, even though they are going in the wrong direction ... The second kind ... is marked by discernment. It tries to grasp exactly where grace or temptation is present ... what is it that the other person is trying to tell me ... This kind of listening seeks to discern the salutary promptings of the good Spirit who proposes to us the Lord's truth ... The third kind ... is the ability to perceive what is driving the other person. This calls for a deeper kind of listening ... able to discern the direction in which that person truly wants to move ... to what is most pleasing to the Lord ... When we listen to others in this way, at a certain moment we ourselves have to disappear ... to let the other person follow the path they have discovered ... without imposing our own roadmaps. For those processes have to do with persons who remain always unique and free." (*Christus Vivit* n. 292-297)

"One who accompanies others has to realize that each person's situation before God and their life in grace are mysteries which no one can fully know from without ... Someone good at such accompaniment does not give in to frustrations or fears (cf. Mt 7:1; Lk 6:37)." (*Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 172)

"Dialogue is our method, not as a shrewd strategy but out of fidelity to the One who never wearies of visiting the marketplace, even at the eleventh hour, to propose his offer of love (Matthew 20:1-16) ... The path ahead, then, is dialogue among yourselves ... Do not be afraid to set out on that 'exodus' which is necessary for all authentic dialogue. Otherwise, we fail to understand the thinking of others, or to realize deep down that the brother or sister we wish to reach and redeem, with the power and the closeness of love, counts more than their positions, distant as they may be from what we hold as true and certain." (Pope Francis addressing the US Bishops, 2015)

"Many parents know only too well the mix of desolation and consolation. Sometimes their children – young or adult – make decisions, or behave in ways, contrary to the Gospel. Yet, as mothers and fathers, far from turning away, they stay close, ever ready to offer a hand or word that redirects rather than scolds (*Benedict XVI, Spe Salvi*, 38). They pray for their daughter or son, entrusting them to our merciful God while continuing to walk alongside them in love." (NZ Bishops – *Bearers of Consolation and Hope*)

# The Nature and Limits of Faithful Accompaniment at the End of Life

The recent introduction of legalised euthanasia in Aotearoa has raised numerous questions about how Catholic ministers (priests, chaplains and parish lay persons) can best accompany people who are contemplating euthanasia.

Catholic teaching is unequivocal in its opposition to euthanasia. As the CDF's *Declaration on Euthanasia* (1980) notes: "No authority can legitimately recommend or permit such an action. For it is a question of the violation of the divine law, an offense against the dignity of the human person, a crime against life, and an attack on humanity." As the NZ Bishops recently noted in *Ministers of Consolation and Hope: Principles and Guidelines for those working with and ministering to people contemplating assisted dying (MCH)*, this means that any form of cooperation in the act of facilitating or administering an assisted death must always be excluded.

However, our Catholic moral tradition also promotes the importance of caring for the sick and dying, a teaching that is rooted in the teachings of Jesus and expressed from the earliest times in the form of one of the seven corporal works of mercy. This teaching is well articulated in various places, most recently in the 2020 Letter from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Samaritanus Bonus (SB)* which notes:

*The quality of love and care for persons in critical and terminal stages of life contributes to assuaging the terrible, desperate desire to end one's life. Only human warmth and evangelical fraternity can reveal a positive horizon of support to the sick person in hope and confident trust. Such accompaniment is part of the path defined by palliative care that includes the patients and their families.*" (Part V,10)

SB also notes:

*Pastoral accompaniment involves the exercise of the human and Christian virtues of empathy, of compassion, of bearing another's suffering by sharing it, and of the consolation of entering into the solitude of others to make them feel loved, accepted, accompanied, and sustained ... In this essential mission it is extremely important to bear witness to and unite truth and charity with which the gaze of the Good Shepherd never ceases to accompany all of His children ... It is ... important that priests be formed in this Christian accompaniment. Since there may be particular circumstances that make it difficult for a priest to be present at the bedside, physicians and healthcare workers need this formation as well.* (Part V,10)

The goal for Catholic ministers working with the dying is to be able to uphold the Church's commitment to the dying alongside its opposition to euthanasia, a significant challenge well described by the NZ Bishops in their recent Pastoral Statement on the spiritual and pastoral care of those contemplating assisted dying as a journey involving a mix of desolation and

consolation; a journey in which the call of faith leads us to a place not of our own choosing, a place we might rather not be.

It is precisely because "the pleas of gravely ill people who sometimes ask for death are not necessarily to be understood as implying a true desire for euthanasia; in fact, it is almost always a case of an anguished plea for help and love" (SB, V.1) that the NZ Bishops document, *MCH*, drawing on SB V.1, insists on the importance of the Church always providing accompaniment; of being "an *abiding with* that can instil hope". It also explains why, if a minister feels that they cannot complete this journey for personal or professional reasons, *MCH* insists that they find a replacement minister.

*MCH*'s insistence on the right that a patient has to be accompanied as they journey towards death has been interpreted by some as implying that Catholic ministers should be there at the time of a person's procured death by euthanasia. This poses a valid and important question, which *MCH* does not directly address.

To adequately answer such a question begs a prior question about what we understand by the notion 'faithful accompaniment'. Flowing from this, and keeping in mind that our faith tells us there is no place or situation where God's grace cannot be encountered, is a question about the limits of pastoral accompaniment for people persisting on a firm path towards euthanasia. A further related question then arises regarding the nature of, and people's rights to, the sacraments – whether there are circumstances in which it might be appropriate to deny the sacraments to someone contemplating euthanasia, especially if the person concerned may not yet be deemed to "willingly persist" in their decision (see SB, Section v.11).

Against the backdrop of these challenging and uncomfortable questions, Issue 66 of the Nathaniel Report seeks to deepen the conversation about what faithful accompaniment at the end of life might look like.

Because the concept of accompaniment is an ancient one, deeply embedded in the Christian spiritual tradition as well as many secular caring professions, we have asked a range of people to share insights from their particular field of practice. To that end we offer the following nine reflections on accompaniment related to: counselling; spiritual direction; mental health; medical healthcare; the environment; prison chaplaincy; hospital chaplaincy; social services advocacy; the pastoral care of those contemplating an abortion; day-to-day life

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*Dr John Kleinsman PhD is the director of the Nathaniel Centre – Te Kupenga and Acting Chief Executive of Te Kupenga – the Catholic Leadership Institute.*

# Spiritual Direction as Accompaniment

Neil Vaney

## The role of a director

Many authors acknowledge that 'spiritual direction' is a misnomer. The image it portrays is of one person 'directing' i.e., shaping, teaching, and informing another. A more realistic picture would be of two adventurers exploring a strange land together – perhaps tundra. There are few recognisable landmarks, maps are vague and compasses inaccurate.

Living a loving, committed Christian life in such a time as ours is like living in Siberia. Many do it, even successfully and happily, but never alone. There are the familiar crises common to every age: unexpected deaths, failed relationships, struggles to believe. Yet today, the average believer also bears the stresses listed by the Stanford School of Business: lack of health insurance, constant lay-offs, lack of discretion and autonomy in decision-making, long working hours, low levels of organizational justice, and unrealistic demands. Here in New Zealand, we could add: Covid, homelessness and increasing global disasters.

Spiritual direction is accompanying a fellow traveller, like Dante, away from hell, through the sufferings of purgatory, to where the risen Christ awaits to embrace us. To make the journey entails navigating personal inner chasms and environmental perils.

## The work of direction

The first resource a spiritual director offers is in exploring the unique mystery of each individual. So many of our memories, joys, and hurts, are crystallized remnants of what other people told us (parents, teachers, religious), overlaid by personal cutting and shaping of such memories. Coming to know and accept Christ and God demands an honest stocktake and disclosure of such memories. This is usually a long and slow process with alternating 'ah ha' and 'oh no' moments. An authentic director has made this journey (and is still doing so) and therefore helps the hidden, inner child to be acknowledged and welcomed to the world.

## A recent scenario

Then come the social and environmental battlefields of our modern societies. In his recent book *Stolen Focus* (Bloomsbury 2022), Johann Hari offers a superbly researched presentation of the struggles facing the contemporary pilgrim. I will pick out a few that I believe are particularly hostile to spiritual depth and growth.

First comes the intensity and pace of modern life. Personal, regional, and global disasters come cascading down upon us in full screen and vivid print. In the past year we have lived through mid-Canterbury and Westport floods, the Covid crisis, the Tongan volcanic eruption, the occupation of parliament's grounds, and the war in the Ukraine. Hari recalls how the terrorist attacks on the Christchurch mosques were live streamed as they happened.

Such an assault on our senses has had multiple effects. The first Hari records is falling attention and inability to concentrate. A University of California study showed that adults working in offices typically stick at one task for just three minutes. Accompanying this is a huge drop off in reading times and skills; 57% of Americans no longer read a single book in a year. By 2017, whereas he or she spent just seventeen minutes a day reading, they spent 5.4 hours on the phone. Children between 13-17 were sending a text message every six minutes.

These statistics reveal a huge shift in the way that people come to understand the world and human life. Whereas books, e.g., the Scriptures, encourage reflection in depth and questions that may reverberate days, even weeks, after reading, social media platforms such as Twitter operate on the model that life can be digested in bites of just 280 characters.

*...even good people are attracted and emotionally hooked more by disturbing and violent images than serene country scenes. This is part of the reason that fake news travels six times more rapidly than standard reporting...*

Hari also points to the amount of sleep deprivation suffered by large numbers; 40% of US citizens get less than the minimum of seven hours each night. This pattern is exacerbated by the impact of what has been labelled 'surveillance capitalism'. Television and social media make money through advertising. The longer they can get viewers glued to their screens the greater the profits. Sophisticated algorithms monitor individual tastes and preferences and feed them back in ever-increasing quantities to viewers.

One of the most alarming dimensions of these trends is what psychologists call 'negativity bias' – even good people are attracted and emotionally hooked more by disturbing and violent images than serene country scenes. This is part of the reason that fake news travels six times more rapidly than standard reporting and has been highlighted as a strong reason driving political violence in the USA and anti-vaccination demonstrations all over the world.

## The response of spiritual direction

How can spiritual directors help to provide true compass bearings in such a fraught world? First of all, they provide a loving, long-term ear to the discoveries that one's companion is making. Though professional, this is also a loving relationship, encouraging trust and openness as new perspectives open up, perhaps over a course of some years.

Secondly, an experienced director is able to take situations from the life of Jesus and the early Church, making links and comparisons by the use of images and stories that enshrine universal experiences and values.

*Continues on page 6*

# Accompaniment as Spiritual Direction

Anne Powell

One night in mainland China in 2014, Clare O'Connor and I were with a group of Cenacle Sisters when we all became seriously lost. Eventually we asked help from a policeman who told us that all buses had stopped for the night. Trying to decide what to do, we stood together, feeling anxious. To boost our spirits and stir up hope, we began to sing "I am with you on the journey."

This is at the heart of accompaniment: *I am with you on the journey.*

People whose calling is to accompany others, do so in a wide variety of contexts. As Cenacle Sisters, our founding mission is to accompany people on their faith journeys as they seek God and meaning in the joys and sorrows, anxieties and hopes of their daily lives. Accompaniment is never in a vacuum but always in the context of life lived in the world. For Cenacle Sisters and some of our Cenacle Companions, accompaniment is usually through spiritual direction and retreats. These are ways to help others reflect on their experience of God in the reality of their living or dying.

Three stories about this:

Two years ago, I sat, feeling vulnerable, at the hospital bed of a friend. He had been told he was dying. A family member encouraged him "You've got to fight this." I asked my friend "Do you want to be well?" A question like this enables a person to reach into the uncharted land of the heart, the place of their deepest desires. Awareness of desires is central to spiritual accompaniment. Many times in the Gospels, we hear Jesus ask "What do you want?"

For many years, I accompanied someone who lived with advancing dementia. In the last years of his life in care, he remained dignified. Along with my community, I was with him as we danced together, sang, laughed, prayed and enjoyed cups of tea with muffins. Such accompaniment calls for flexibility and simple presence to presence. This was an experience of the Word becoming flesh. The person might not have realised it, but he taught me the generous acceptance of the hard reality of dementia. Patience, simplicity and love were enough. As often happens in accompaniment, I was the receiver.

I accompany a woman who struggles with the institutional

Church. This was intensified during Covid and the spread of Omicron. She became more isolated, disconnected and disillusioned. Such feelings can sometimes lead people into dark places. But with patient accompaniment, discernment and addressing the deep desires, such feelings can become springs that lead to freedom and fuller life. This woman's disillusionment became a strength which encouraged her to seek what was lifegiving. As I accompanied her, she learned to start with small steps from her own reality. She prayed through art. She discovered she could tell God her feelings of disconnection. Her relationship with God opened up. Consolation gradually took the place of isolation.

These three stories remind me that spiritual accompaniment happens in many contexts, sometimes formal and at other times, informal. It's a stance of the heart.

In accompanying others, I value the mutual support of my Cenacle community, the wider Cenacle Family and those engaged in the same ministry of accompaniment through spiritual direction. On the Kāpiti Coast, we have an active group of spiritual directors who meet regularly for on-going formation. We all have supervision for our ministry.

We don't enter into the ministry of accompaniment alone but with God, with Jesus who companions us and the Spirit who hovers over our beautiful and aching world.

I bring to accompaniment my own humanity, vulnerability, some skills, and the grace of God in it all. I bring few answers and I bring questions that hopefully invite the person to risk the deep down listening to their own reality and desires. Mostly, it's all about that encounter of humanity and divinity – God-with-us.

P.S. We reached home safely that night in China. One of our group spoke Cantonese and with her help we managed to squeeze into two small taxis and get home.

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*Continued from page 5*

A third skill is being able to help directees see that their angers and frustrations may be pumped up by the images and posts that they are following, in media or from friends, and teaching them how to acknowledge and defuse such floating anger.

Fourthly, today's directors help their clients to pray in ways that fit into their busy lives. There are three books on my shelf with the titles *Prayer in the Digital Age*, *28 Ways to Pray*, and *Earth Prayers* illustrating the changing needs to meet modern situations. Finally, but not least; directors can be models of

prayer, offering to pray for and with those they accompany. While tramping through the wilderness, it gives enormous reassurance to be walking with one who recognises false trails, can read the contours of the land, and stays by one's side till the final goal is clearly in sight.

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*Rev Dr Neil Vaney is Pastoral Director of the Catholic Enquiry Centre, and also spends time working as a spiritual director.*

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# Accompaniment: Witnessing God's Unconditional Love

Lisa Beech

*"We need to show care for all life and for the life of everyone and thus to reveal the original and unconditional love of God, the source of the meaning of all life"*

– *Samaritanus Bonus*

I know intellectually about God's compassionate and unconditional love. I believe it but I don't always feel it for myself. One of the joys of accompanying people in times of struggle is experiencing and witnessing God's love for them, which they also can't always feel and experience themselves.

Often at such times different Biblical accounts come to life for me – the loving Father running out to welcome his lost son before a word of apology is spoken; Christ inviting himself to Zacchaeus' house for dinner before any words of repentance are heard. At these times I experience the person of Jesus who described himself as coming not for the healthy but for the sick. I get to be a first-hand witness to the way in which God's unconditional love often precedes the change in people's hearts.

One time I experienced this was with a family at a Benefit Impact event, where benefit advocates gather to assist beneficiaries at a Work and Income office. This family had been waiting for some hours when I was asked to be their advocate – the father on crutches and the daughter in a wheelchair, supported by the mother who was working part-time while receiving some benefit income.

It became obvious that medical and disability costs ate into every area of their tiny household budget. A quick glance at their benefit print-out showed they were receiving little disability allowance and were repaying a large amount of debt. I felt confident putting this situation before the Work and Income case manager.

It turned out that the case manager had personal understanding of the family's medical conditions and asked both delicate and blunt questions which revealed needs I had never considered. The exhausted mother shared with intense embarrassment that her husband's and daughter's incontinence meant she had to handwash bedding and bed clothes several times a day. The large debt the family had was the result of a charge of benefit fraud when she had earned additional income which she hadn't declared. Her hands shook as she shared this, and she covered her face to hide her shame.

The case manager put through recommendations for increased disability allowance, as well as for assistance for a washing machine, additional bedding, and other equipment they needed. Then she surprised me, saying loudly, "Your advocate is insisting that all of this assistance is non-recoverable." It hadn't occurred to me to ask that the assistance was supplied as a grant rather than a loan. I jumped at the hint and said, "Yes, we expect this is non-recoverable," and the recommendation was accepted by her manager.

As we walked away from the desk, the mother asked if they

really didn't have to pay it back, and I said casually, without really thinking about the words I chose, "Yes, you had a great case manager, God was with us today." And she broke down and burst into tears, standing in the middle of the Work and Income office sobbing, "God doesn't care about us, we're sinners, we've committed benefit fraud."

God's love for her and her family was suddenly so vivid to me that it was as though the sun came out just to shine on them. Her skin seemed to glow with it. It seemed to me that I was looking into the burning bush, hearing God's voice saying *I have heard my people cry*.

At first, I didn't know how to tell her. She was still hiding her face and her tears from me. I could see that she couldn't feel the love that surrounded her, that seemed to fill the room. I felt my first words were stumbling, inadequate. "No, no, please, you have to know that God loves you."

The queue of beneficiaries waiting to see benefit advocates was long, and the organisers were keen to assign me to another family. But I had to wave them aside, to sit down with the sobbing, shaking mother. She told me she had been too ashamed to speak to anyone in her church or her family about her conviction for benefit fraud, and how it was only desperation that had driven her to the Work and Income Office that day. She spoke of being too ashamed to pray, to ask God for forgiveness.

Again, I stuttered and stumbled over the words, trying to explain to her how clearly I felt God's love for her and her family, how God saw and understood her poverty, how God forgave her, how God loved her for her care for her husband and daughter.

I think if I had been glib and smooth, she may not have believed me. But my struggle to explain to her what I was experiencing seemed to get through to her. Finally, she lifted her head and looked me in the eyes and said, "Well, I don't feel that God loves me, but I feel that you know God loves me." And she thanked me and left.

I tried to call her that evening, but the phone number she had given me was disconnected. I've long wanted to thank her, especially in those times when I am overcome by shame and a feeling that God's love is far from me.

We are meant to accompany each other. Faithful accompaniment involves us looking deeply into the eyes and heart of a person rather than focusing on what they may have done. Faithful accompaniment involves us seeing ourselves and others as God sees us. Sometimes I can see God's love for another person when they can't, and sometimes another person can see God's love for me when I can't. God didn't make us as isolated individuals, but as a community. God brings us to God through each other.

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# Accompaniment – The Work of the Holy Spirit

Michael McCabe

Together with the themes of mercy and discernment, accompaniment has been a common refrain during the pontificate of Pope Francis. These pastoral themes form the backdrop for the parish priest or chaplain and his or her care of the people of God. Simply put, accompaniment requires mercy mixed with discernment, wisdom and patience, and a fair modicum of trust, as people navigate major decisions in their lives. Nowhere is this more apparent than when accompanying people as they make conscience decisions concerning the beginning and end of life.

By creating a fertile pastoral space in which the grace of the Holy Spirit can move and inform hearts, the pastor or chaplain introduces a “via media”; a middle way for individuals and couples to discover a way forward as they face dilemmas surrounding the gift of life for themselves and for others.

Not long after the new Church of Saint Joseph's Parish in Mount Victoria, Wellington City, was blessed and opened in 2004, I received a call from a couple who wanted to talk with me. Saint Joseph's, a vibrant inner-city parish, is adjacent to the Basin Reserve, well-known as a fulcrum – a turning point for traffic coming into and out of the city.

I suggested we meet in the Church, in the beautifully appointed Suzanne Aubert Chapel, named after the Venerable Suzanne Aubert, Foundress of the Sisters of Compassion. As I greeted Sara and Greg (not their real names), they told me they had seen me occasionally at Sunday mass. I could not recall meeting them - a “red flag” to listen even more carefully to their story, a story they recounted with frankness and with pace.

Sara was European and had met Greg on a working holiday to New Zealand. They had lived together for a couple of years, but both acknowledged their relationship was over and Sara was returning to her homeland. After making bookings for her return flight, Sara discovered that she was pregnant – hence the request to talk with me.

From the beginning they made it clear that “this baby was not a reason to get back together.” Sara then said that she had “made an appointment to fly to Auckland on Monday to have an abortion at Auckland hospital”.

I was intrigued that they continually referred to their unborn child as “this baby”. They also said that they “were very aware of the Church’s teaching about life beginning at conception” but that “was not for them”.

Their honesty was disarming, but as they talked, I had an increasing sense of their openness, reminding me of the gospel story of the two sons (Matthew 21:28-32). One son said he would not go to the vineyard to work when his father asked him to, while the other son said he would go to work in the vineyard but never did. The first son later changed his mind and went – his adamant “No”, over time, became a change of heart, and a “Yes”.

In the silences of that chapel I prayed “Come Holy Spirit” – a prayer Suzanne Aubert must have prayed often in her discernment path, “Wairua tapu, nau mai ra”. Even so, I felt a

certain loneliness in accompanying Sara and Greg, all the while trying to maintain compassion for them when they seemed to have made up their minds to make a choice I could not agree with. When the conversation tapered off, I asked them if I might anoint them both, and said: “I would like to celebrate the sacrament of anointing with you so that whatever your final decision is, you will know that your child will always be a blessing for you both.”

After the anointing, and after assuring them of my prayers, I left them in the chapel and said goodbye. I never saw them again to talk to but did observe them walking around the Basin Reserve on that drizzly Saturday afternoon – their very own circular road to Emmaus.

I could only watch from a distance and pray for them. I could not control the outcome of their discernment.

Years later I read these words from Pope Francis in *Christus Vivit* (nn. 295-297), which encapsulated for me that rainy Saturday afternoon at Saint Joseph's. The pastoral wisdom of Pope Francis was both consoling and inspirational:

*“In the end, good discernment is a path of freedom that brings to full fruit what is unique in each person, something so personal that only God knows it. Others cannot fully understand or predict from the outside how it will develop.*

*When we listen to others in this way, at a certain moment we ourselves have to disappear in order to let the other person follow the path he or she has discovered.*

*Because ‘time is greater than space’ we need to encourage and accompany processes, without imposing our own roadmaps. For those processes have to do with persons who remain always unique and free. There are no easy recipes, even when all the signs seem positive, since positive factors themselves need to be subjected to a careful work of discernment, so that they do not become isolated and contradict one another, becoming absolutes and at odds with one another. The same is true for the negative factors, which are not to be rejected en bloc and without distinction, because in each one there may lie hidden some value which awaits liberation and restoration to its full truth.”*

Although I never saw Sara and Greg again, I was told later that Sara did fly to Auckland on that Monday morning and went to Auckland hospital to have her abortion. While she was lying outside the operating theatre, she changed her mind. She hopped off the gurney, went back to her room, got dressed, discharged herself, and flew back to Wellington. She had decided to keep the baby and eventually she returned to Europe for its birth.

That baby will now be eighteen years old.

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*Rev Dr Michael McCabe is the founding director of the Nathaniel Centre and currently the parish priest of Te Whetu o Te Moana – Star of the Sea Parish, Marlborough.*

# Accompanying the Earth

Jim McAlloon

Accompaniment is usually thought of as relationships between people. How might we think about accompaniment and the Earth, our common home?

If we understand accompaniment as including ideas of travelling respectfully with the accompanied, there's an element of mutuality and of relationship. Put like that, it's not such a leap to think about accompaniment and the environment.

Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, takes this approach. In his first sentence, Francis observes that the Earth "is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us".

Care for creation – accompanying, "travelling with" the Earth – is embedded in the Scriptures. Even as we use the resources of the Earth, we are commanded to do so thoughtfully and carefully. The Hebrew Scriptures remind us that those resources are for everyone. In Leviticus and Deuteronomy, the people are warned to refrain from taking too much, and to ensure that enough is left for others. A psalm tells us that "mercy and faithfulness have met/justice and peace have embraced" and "the Lord will make us prosper/and our Earth shall yield its fruit" (Ps 85).

In drawing our attention to escalating crises of waste, pollution, the loss of biodiversity, and climate change, Pope Francis looked back to his namesake from Assisi, and noted that "If we approach nature and the environment without [an] openness to awe and wonder, if we no longer speak the language of fraternity and beauty in our relationship with the world, our attitude will be that of masters, consumers, ruthless exploiters, unable to set limits on their immediate needs. By contrast, if we feel intimately united with all that exists, then sobriety and care will well up spontaneously" (LS 11).

We should not be under any illusions about the scale of the ecological crisis. Caritas Aotearoa's annual State of the Environment report for Oceania makes it plain that extreme weather events are affecting many people in the smaller Pacific islands, as well as the larger ones, like our own country. The quality of water – fundamental to life – is often poor. The International Panel on Climate Change has been warning for years about the consequences of continued increases in greenhouse gas emissions. The impacts are evident: fragile polar ice sheets, rising sea levels, increased temperatures on land and sea, as well as extreme weather. The available time to limit emissions and limit the increase in temperature is falling fast and, as the Panel warns, "To limit global warming, strong, rapid, and sustained reductions in CO<sub>2</sub>, methane, and other greenhouse gases are necessary" ([https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/outreach/IPCC\\_AR6\\_WGI\\_Press\\_Conference\\_Slides.pdf](https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/downloads/outreach/IPCC_AR6_WGI_Press_Conference_Slides.pdf)).

Our Church's Dicastery for Integral Human Development has recently launched a multi-year *Laudato Si'* Action Platform. Among the seven goals is "adoption of sustainable lifestyles", necessary alike in the interests of healing the Earth and

ensuring the needs of all people are met. This involves the virtues of sobriety and humility, which are basic to right living (LS 222-27). The American Benedictine sister, Joan Chittister, writes of Benedictine spirituality as including a value of "enoughness", of limiting consumption. "Watch, and be on your guard against avarice of any kind, for life does not consist of an abundance of possessions" (Lk 12:15).

*Respectfully travelling with the Earth – as well as basic justice – requires us to limit our consumption. This involves more than personal conversion – important though that is. It also requires big changes in economic and political spheres...*

Walking with the Earth also calls for a mindset of gratitude. For that reason, Pope Francis asked us to give thanks to God before and after meals. A Native American plant scientist, Robin Wall Kimmerer, has, in her book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, much to say about the critical importance of gratitude in the context of Indigenous views of the Earth and its fruits, for if you forget gratitude, you might take more than you need. Of course, we do not need to look overseas for such insights. Pākehā need only listen to Māori on, for example, the critical importance of water quality. Gabrielle Huria of Ngāi Tahu says of the degraded rivers of Canterbury: "Spiritual identity is tied up in it... sense of place... For me what breaks my heart is our kids won't be able to do any of it [fishing, swimming, or gathering traditional foods] because it's too dirty. As a parent your whole purpose is to pass on to your children the messages of your generation, and what do we pass on to them? Something broken and dying" (<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/dec/25/trauma-dislocation-pollution-why-maori-leaders-want-control-of-the-south-islands-water>).

Respectfully travelling with the Earth – as well as basic justice – requires us to limit our consumption. This involves more than personal conversion – important though that is. It also requires big changes in economic and political spheres; "Social problems must be addressed by community networks and not simply by the sum of individual good deeds." (LS 219).

Yet things can change. A few months ago, I was able to photograph gannets diving into the Porirua Harbour. A friend (who had been responsible for some years for restoring the harbour's health) commented that this was extremely good news, for it meant that there was again food in that much-polluted water to sustain the birds. Such positive examples of improvement, of walking with the Earth, "do not solve global problems, but they do show that men and women are still capable of intervening positively... gestures of generosity, solidarity and care cannot but well up within us, since we were made for love" (LS 58).

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# The Art of Accompaniment in Prison Ministry

Romano Tikotikoca

*"I belong neither here nor there but wherever God wants me to be"* – St Vincent De Paul

It's been two years since I became a Catholic prison chaplain at Hawkes Bay Regional Prison, but it feels like yesterday that I walked through the gatehouse for my induction. I remember my first day of work vividly, overwhelmed with the feelings of anxiety, fear, excitement, and feeling butterflies in my stomach and shivers down my spine as I walked into the unknown.

I clearly remember one afternoon being called into a unit as I was just leaving the office to finish for the day. I was informed that one of the men had received a bad phone call from home and the best person to talk to was the chaplain. As usual, before going to see a man I would spend a couple of minutes in the chapel praying "The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2). I would also look up the basic information of the man to see if there were any risks that I needed to be aware of. Walking into the unit, I was directed into the interview room to wait for him. As he walked in, I could feel the mood in the room change and felt a heaviness present.

*...prison chaplaincy is a vocation and calling – a call to serve men and women, young and old who are incarcerated. It is a call to journey and walk with the tāne and wāhine. It is a call in which I am required to listen with the ears of my heart, to see without judgement, to lend a helping hand without expecting a reward, to walk an extra mile, to comfort, to reassure, to guide and to be authentic.*

As we started our kōrero, I found out that the man had just lost his new-born baby and his partner was in hospital in a serious condition. I thought, "How do I respond to this? What do I say? What shall I do? How do I comfort this grieving father? Am I safe to be alone with this man?" These were some of the questions I wrestled with. However, little did the man know that I was also grieving for the loss of my uncle back in Fiji and had been trying to be brave and strong to hold myself together.

*To be a prison chaplain is not for the faint of heart. It cannot be considered merely a job, occupation, or work. Rather, prison chaplaincy is a vocation and calling...*

As I ministered to the man and allowed him to express his feelings and frustrations, I became concerned about what I was allowed to do and not do. As he wept bitterly and poured his heart out, I couldn't stop myself and drew closer to him to hug him. I knew that what I was doing could be seen as pushing the boundary, but at that time he needed me, he needed a friend and I believed it was where God needed me to be.

To be a prison chaplain is not for the faint of heart. It cannot be considered merely a job, occupation, or work. Rather, prison chaplaincy is a vocation and calling – a call to serve men and women, young and old who are incarcerated. It is a call to journey and walk with the tāne and wāhine. It is a call in which I am required to listen with the ears of my heart, to see without judgement, to lend a helping hand without expecting a reward, to walk an extra mile, to comfort, to reassure, to guide and to be authentic. It is a call to which I am required to be the hands that comfort, the eyes which see with compassion, the ears that listen without judgment, a mouth that speaks of God's love and the feet to carry the men in my prayers every day.

*To faithfully accompany, I must heed God's call to surrender each day and let God be in control. To faithfully accompany, I must act on the desires that God has placed in my heart.*

Prison chaplaincy is not a walk in the park. It has its challenges and barriers. There have been times in which I have asked myself "is it worth it?" There have been times that I have been threatened, sworn at, ridiculed, and spat at. But there have also been times in which men have come to my defence, times I have been encouraged, times that I have shed tears, times I have been ministered to, and times I have seen the saving grace and God's hand at work in the men's lives.

Accompanying men in prison is a rewarding vocation. To accompany them, I must have the heart to help and work and walk with men who have been classified as criminals and prisoners; men who have been classified as the scum of society, who have been physically, sexually, and mentally abused and neglected, who have grown up in gang life and who suffer from the effects of drugs and mental illness. Accompanying means I don't have the luxury of pointing a finger or throwing the first stone. I don't have the luxury of judging them, as they have already been judged by the courts and by society.

In my accompaniment, I am constantly reminded to follow the examples of the great teacher and servant, Jesus; to witness to my faith, to teach what I believe, believe what I teach and practice what I teach. To faithfully accompany, I must heed God's call to surrender each day and let God be in control. To faithfully accompany, I must act on the desires that God has placed in my heart. To faithfully accompany, I must dedicate my life to Jesus and pray in the words of St Ignatius Loyola: "Lord Jesus Christ, take all my freedom, my memory, my understanding, and my will. Your love and Your grace is enough for me. Amen."

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*Romano Tikotikoca is a former seminarian of the Auckland Diocese who now resides in Hastings where he works as a Catholic prison chaplain at Hawkes Bay Regional Prison.*

# Accompanying the Depressed and Suicidal

Bridget Taumoepeau

Depression is an illness, not just "feeling a bit down". There are degrees of depression and, in its most serious form, it may be accompanied by suicidal thoughts and intentions.

In my practice I saw many people with depression. Some were having a reaction to difficult times, loss, or grief, but could respond to support and looking at ways to get through the hard times. Others were more seriously ill, with an overwhelming negativity in their thoughts. They would be filled with irrational guilt, or fear for the future, or despair. If you are overwhelmed with those thoughts suicide may, indeed, seem a way out. A recurring theme was often that their family or friends would be better off without them.

*...accompaniment is not just of the unwell person but of those around them – not just to support but to explain treatment, to ask for their cooperation, to dispel false beliefs about depression and to make sure that we are all on the same page.*

There are many aspects to the accompaniment of people in this situation. Firstly, it is the understanding that they are unwell; that this is an illness, not a choice to be miserable. It is logical, therefore, to look at treatment, just as one would for a physical illness, but the difficulty may be that the person does not recognise their illness, instead being fixated on their unworthiness. We have to realise the stresses that are placed on the family and friends of those who are depressed, alongside the terror that their family member may kill themselves.

And so, accompaniment is not just of the unwell person but of those around them – not just to support but to explain treatment, to ask for their cooperation, to dispel false beliefs about depression and to make sure that we are all on the same page. One needs to be in for the long haul, as depression with all its ramifications is not a brief illness. Even when the crisis is over, there is work to do in helping the sufferer understand themselves, their vulnerabilities and how they can prevent a relapse.

People often have very negative feelings towards psychiatry; they are suspicious of medication, to say nothing of ECT and psychiatric hospitals. Those around them may have their own views of how to get better – how to "pull up your socks"; "take a holiday"; "leave your husband"; "stop that medication" or whatever else they think will help. Behind all this may be a sense of shame – that mental illness should be hidden, that "it doesn't happen in our family", illustrating the stigma that still exists. Or a belief that their friend or relative would not really take their own life, maybe it is just a cry for help.

The therapist must accept these opinions – arguing one's way out of it will not help. Instead, listening; understanding where that is coming from; offering information about treatment; keeping people informed all the way along; thanking them for the role they play in loving and supporting their family member – all this will encourage the possibility of successful treatment.

The positive side of all this is that depression is an eminently treatable condition. There are many modes of treatment and often the best way to approach things is to combine two or more modalities. So, the first task is the assessment and understanding of the person, their symptoms and their situation. No two people are the same and it is usually not helpful to say, "I know how you feel". Whatever they feel is unique to them and accepting that is very important.

Because depression can be treated, this means that a severely ill or suicidal person must be cared for while treatment begins to work and those thoughts dissipate. The person themselves may be utterly unconvinced that there is a way out, that recovery can occur, that they will once more take pleasure in things and people about them. So, we have a responsibility to intervene, even against the person's wishes. Hence the importance of supporting family and friends to all walk together towards healing. Again, we must explain that this is an illness – if they had a neurological illness, like a stroke, we would expect treatment. The brain and mind are inextricably linked and both deserve healing.

*The therapist must bring security, and that security is not judgemental. Compassion is required aplenty – not only for the patient, but also for those around them who will feel overwhelmed by the negativity and concern.*

Being consistent in our support is important – the world is a scary place when you are depressed. The therapist must bring security, and that security is not judgemental. Compassion is required aplenty – not only for the patient, but also for those around them who will feel overwhelmed by the negativity and concern. Seeing the person as one who deserves as much dignity as anyone else is an important part of developing a relationship with them. A relationship that will walk with them, accept their despair, intervene when they place themselves in danger; encourage them in their journey to wellness and their understanding that they are treasured and loved.

In this situation we need to understand suicidality as part of the illness or response to intolerable aspects of life, and not as a sin. As *Samaritanus Bonus* reminds us, we must show "human warmth and fraternity". We never know when we ourselves may be consumed with similar despair.

It is a privilege to walk with a depressed person and their family. The reward is in seeing the return of happiness, the loss of despair and the re-establishment of hope in someone's life.

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*Dr Bridget Taumoepeau is a retired psychiatrist, whose work centred around the rehabilitation of those with serious mental illness. In retirement she has undertaken both undergraduate and post-graduate study in theology.*

# A Counsellor's Reflection on the Gift of Accompanying Another

Judy McCormack

Accompanying another is when we are invited and choose to walk alongside that person. It's about being a companion with them for a time on their journey.

When, as a counsellor, I am asked to walk alongside another, I seek to clarify with them what they are seeking from me and, in turn, I communicate with them what I am skilled and experienced and willing to provide. Establishing a clear contract that is agreed to by both allows a purpose to be developed for our being together so that we can journey in a safe and ethical way; it forms an initial step on the counselling journey.

People who seek counselling do so for a variety of reasons – to deal with challenging situations, to enhance their understanding of themselves, to improve their relationship with themselves and others, or to find meaning, purpose and value in life so that they can develop more resourceful ways of living. The foundation of any counselling journey (process) is the relationship (professional relationship) that is formed between the counsellor and the person seeking help (the client).

*I am not the other person, and their journey is their journey and not mine. However, the very act of being accompanied at certain times in our lives can be a lovely gift of "human kindness" which can relieve us for a while of our existential aloneness.*

From my first contact with another, I am mindful of the "core conditions" of counselling that form the essence of any counselling process: empathy – trying to understand the client's point of view; congruence – being a genuine person, authentic and honest; unconditional positive regard – being non-judgmental. When these core conditions are present, the theory is that the client will feel safe enough to access their own potential through the counselling process.

Other qualities that come into my work include respect, warmth, kindness, and a genuine joy in the work. Being compassionate is when I try to imagine what it's like to be in the other person's shoes. I may not myself have been in a similar situation in my life, however, being compassionate may allow me to have some understanding of what it could be like for the person I am accompanying.

In accompanying (counselling) I am both professional and personal. I am a human being and therefore I can be impacted personally by this experience. I am challenged by what the other person is facing, I am moved with compassion for them, and I too need to have support for myself in the process (we call this professional supervision). In other words, accompanying costs! Self-care and taking a break are also ways in which I maintain ethical and safe practice. Maintaining competent practice through professional development (PD) and regular supervision is an ethical requirement that includes working within the limits of my knowledge, skills, and experience.

Sometimes I may need to take my own "fitness to practice" into account. When I find my own emotional, physical, mental, or spiritual health is significantly impaired I will withdraw from part or all of my counselling practice during that period. I may consult my own family, doctor, counsellor, supervisor, or spiritual director as part of this process.

No two people are alike and the suitability of any one particular counsellor for a client is a relevant and ethical consideration. Where it is determined in consultation with the person (client) that another person would be appropriate to be their counsellor, then I would refer the client to another counsellor who may be more appropriate by reason of skills, gender, or culture, or for any other reason indicated by the client's needs. A counsellor's own conscience and ability to accompany a person and consequent freedom to choose or not to accompany another is also a critical consideration.

I am not the other person, and their journey is their journey and not mine. However, the very act of being accompanied at certain times in our lives can be a lovely gift of "human kindness" which can relieve us for a while of our existential aloneness.

When someone seeks help from another person they may be feeling overwhelmed, frightened and lonely, such as when they are unexpectedly pregnant, experiencing intimate person violence from the person they love, the loss of someone close to them, or are facing the reality of their own death.

When I accompany a person, I appreciate that I may not agree with their points of view or the actions they may decide to take; nor am I responsible for the actions of the other. Neither is it ethical or appropriate for me to try to persuade or influence the person to my beliefs or points of view. I may engage with them in exploring their situation, viewpoint, or beliefs as I seek to understand them and their situation more deeply. We may discuss matters and I may provide relevant information that may open up a wider perspective for them in terms of available options, as well as enable them to make connections with others who may also be able to assist/accompany them – family, professional, spiritual, and social. Ultimately, however, part of the gift of accompaniment is allowing them the freedom and dignity of choosing their own path.

My hope is that through my accompanying another person they may come to a place of clarity, peace and wholeness and come to know a loving, compassionate, and merciful God who is the ultimate companion for each one of us as we journey.

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*Judy McCormack (MNZAC) is a mother and grandmother and a qualified Counsellor and Supervisor with 30 years' experience in counselling women, men, young adults, and teenagers for issues related to personal and spiritual growth.*

# Accompanying Those Contemplating Assisted Dying – A Chaplain’s Perspective

Tony Lenton

The recently introduced assisted dying legislation may seem to pose a new set of challenges for hospital chaplains. However, this is not the first serious moral issue to confront chaplains. Nor is it the first challenge to formulating best chaplaincy practice that requires protection of the patient’s needs while maintaining a chaplain’s conscience and integrity.

As with other professionals, hospital chaplains bring their personalities and beliefs to their role. At the same time, their words and actions when ministering in public hospitals must also be subject to ‘best chaplaincy practice’, DHB protocols and applicable New Zealand law. Among other things, this means that when conversing with a patient about moral matters, such as abortion or assisted dying, chaplains should be wary of making binary declarations of their personal views.

Although many will have strong opinions about the new end of life legislation, chaplains must firstly project a willingness to be a sympathetic sounding board for a patient or family member in order to help them process the medical and spiritual/psychological implications of a life-limiting prognosis that has recently been presented to them. This kaupapa applies to all patient encounters.

*A patient confronted with a life-limiting prognosis is in existential crisis – they deserve grace, patience, and time.*

World Health Organisation (WHO) codings define a chaplaincy encounter to include spiritual assessment, spiritual guidance, spiritual support and ritual. The assessment element is crucial and ongoing; the chaplain continuously monitors the patient’s spiritual well-being and emotional state during their encounter. The chaplain, like health professionals, must remain patient focused.

When a chaplain first meets a patient, they will, typically, not be able to predict the nature of the encounter so they literally need to be ready for anything. In the case of assisted dying, they should consider that, rather than indicating a firmly fixed intention, an expression of interest in assisted dying may be the simplest way a patient can begin talking about their circumstances.

*The chaplain’s role is to give the patient room to explore what their journey towards death might look like, including letting the patient voice what a chaplain might regard as unthinkable.*

A chaplain’s open-ended response to a patient’s reference to assisted dying might be by way of a gentle but probing question like: “What is happening in your life that you are thinking about assisted dying?” This kind of response, in the form of a hermeneutic of non-judgemental enquiry, can be the chaplain’s

way of showing their concern without attempting to lead or force the conversation in any specific direction.

A patient confronted with a life-limiting prognosis is in existential crisis – they deserve grace, patience, and time. Experience in Oregon, where assisted dying has been available for some time, suggests that the main reasons patients consider assisted dying are closely linked to existential issues, including not wanting to be a burden. Unbearable pain (commonly considered in the eyes of the public to be the main reason for implementing euthanasia) is low on the list.

The chaplain’s role is to give the patient room to explore what their journey towards death might look like, including letting the patient voice what a chaplain might regard as unthinkable. As counsellors know, articulating one’s deepest negative thoughts and feelings potentially robs them of their power and even mystique. Conversely, chaplains who dominate a conversation by expressing their opinion ahead of a patient’s own discernment potentially disempower the patient and undermine the chances of establishing a supportive relationship.

Often, companionable silence may be the best form of ministry. In the Twin Towers aftermath, a Catholic priest and a New York Fireman sat together on upturned buckets for two hours and said nothing. A chaplain’s presence and attention to a patient can provide stability for their emotions and feelings even if the scope of their spoken conversation is limited.

*As chaplains, we should never underestimate the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through our listening, gentle questioning, and quiet prayerful presence, always and only operating from an imperative of love and compassion.*

The Catholic Bishops of Aotearoa have called chaplains to be “Ngā Kaiārahi o te Aroha me to Tūmanako – Ministers of Consolation and Hope.” Their exhortation aligns with chaplaincy protocols that expect all patient conversations to be conducted in a non-directional or non-judgemental (non-proselytising) way that respects the patient as a competent adult with their own conscience. This approach, typically defined as “accompaniment”, lies at the heart of best chaplaincy practice as well as being the face of hope. As the Bishops note, “our faith tells us there is no place or situation, no matter how uncomfortable, where our faith cannot be expressed, or God’s grace encountered.”

While chaplains can and do agree to accompany someone even when they do not agree with their choice, it is understandable that some chaplains may (for a variety of personal or professional reasons) find the subject of assisted dying simply too difficult. If the issue should come up unexpectedly then, in my view, the chaplain should, as early as possible,

indicate to the patient their wish to withdraw from discussing the matter using graceful, non-judgemental language. In the interests of ensuring that a patient continues to get the spiritual accompaniment they are entitled to, they should also indicate that they will ask another chaplain on the team to visit. Sole charge chaplains in this situation should discuss the matter with their diocese and may need to find an appropriate person in the community to support them.

*Chaplains are not problem solvers, but strive to support patients to find answers for themselves in a context in which the chaplain's very presence bears witness to the hope that lies at the heart of Christian Gospel message.*

Chaplains are not problem solvers, but strive to support patients to find answers for themselves in a context in which the chaplain's very presence bears witness to the hope that lies at the heart of the Christian Gospel message – that “it is precisely the loving face of the Church as mother, who never abandons her daughters and sons, which ‘contributes to assuaging the terrible desperate desire to ends one’s life’”.

As chaplains, we should never underestimate the ministry of the Holy Spirit working through our listening, gentle questioning, and quiet prayerful presence, always and only operating from an imperative of love and compassion.

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*Tony Lenton is the senior Catholic hospital chaplain who works with Catholic dioceses to coordinate hospital chaplaincy around Aotearoa on behalf of the NZCBC. He works closely with chaplains of other faith traditions and is part of the National Leadership team of the Interchurch Council for Hospital Chaplaincy. He acts as a chaplaincy locum at Tauranga Hospital and is currently studying for a Masters Degree in Chaplaincy at Otago University.*



TO ALL OF OUR READERS  
AND SUPPORTERS:

**“May the angels protect you, may the sadness forget you, may the goodness surround you, and may the Lord Jesus Christ always bless you”**

**– Pope Francis**

Happy Easter  
from the staff of  
the Nathaniel Centre  
– Te Kupenga

# "Choice will not be necessary" or "Choice will be all that's necessary"

Bernadette Tobin

To legalize so-called "voluntary assisted dying" is to legalize a practice which predictably and inevitably expands.

There is plenty of evidence of "bracket creep" already, both here in Australia and overseas.

From 2017 in Victoria through to 2021 in Queensland, the circumstances in which this service has been made available have widened as bills have been debated in state jurisdictions. So too, within NSW, from 2017 when the parliament of New South Wales debated the Khan Bill to 2021 when it debated the Greenwich Bill: once again the conditions under which the service is to be available have expanded. And there's plenty of evidence of the same phenomenon from Europe and Canada.

Expansion should not surprise us. More important, however, than acknowledging these empirical facts is understanding why they have occurred.

There are, I think, two different forms of pressure which cause this by-now familiar expansion of the laws. I will call the first pressure "choice will not be necessary", and the second pressure "choice will be the only thing that's necessary".

*The social policy before them is not simply a matter of how best to ensure that people do not die in unrelieved suffering. It is also a matter of how to protect the lives of those who, either on their own or at the behest of others, have come to think that their lives are not worth living.*

The "choice will not be necessary" pressure works like this. The patient chooses VAD. Then two doctors assess the person's eligibility: a medical condition, from which the patient will likely die soon, from which he or she is suffering intolerably. The doctors must judge whether these criteria are met. But, if someone else meets these criteria, why will choice be necessary? Why not expand the availability to people who meet these eligibility criteria but who cannot choose?

The pressure to expand availability in this direction can be seen in the arguments of those who say that euthanasia should be made available for new-born babies (as in Holland) and/or to people with dementia (as in Canada). Indeed, some years ago the late Dr Rodney Syme, a proponent of these laws, predicted that, once the service was legally available to those who could choose it, society might come to think that it would be "unfair" if it were not available to people who could not choose it. His reference was to people with dementia. Thus the "choice will not be necessary" prediction.

The "choice will be the only thing that's necessary" pressure goes in the other direction. A patient chooses VAD. Then the doctors must assess his or her eligibility. But they,

understandably, are likely to shy away from making what is mostly a medical judgment (that the patient meets the eligibility criteria) and prefer to rely on the actual choice of the patient.

The pressure to expand availability in this direction, to anyone who chooses, can be seen in Canada where they have dropped the requirement that death must be reasonably foreseeable on the grounds that that requirement discriminates against people with serious disabilities who are not terminally ill. Thus, the pressure towards "choice will be the only thing that is necessary" prediction.

These two forms of pressure, which seem to go in opposite directions, in fact share an assumption: that we can know when a life is not worth living. In the former case, that assumption is made "objectively" by others. In the latter case, that assumption is made "subjectively" by the person himself or herself.

This is why most of the debate about the (in)adequacy of the "safeguards" in these bills misses the point. However humane one's motives in supporting these laws, the likelihood of the criteria of eligibility being expanded cannot be set aside as though it were mere panic-mongering.

Parliamentarians, in framing laws for the well-being of everyone in the community, have a responsibility to deepen and widen their thinking. The social policy before them is not simply a matter of how best to ensure that people do not die in unrelieved suffering. It is also a matter of how to protect the lives of those who, either on their own or at the behest of others, have come to think that their lives are not worth living. Their existential demoralization is a challenge to us all.

Yes, I'm a Catholic. So, it will be said that I'm trying to impose my religious beliefs on those who don't share them. Well, any reasonable religion holds out its social teachings as matters which are apt for rational assessment. But, that said, there is nothing religious in the claim that expansion of these laws is both predictable and inevitable.

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## The Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics

### THE STORY BEHIND THE NAME

The red flowers of the Pohutukawa appear in December each year. At Cape Reinga on the northern tip of New Zealand there is a lone Pohutukawa, thought to be 800 years old. In Māori tradition the spirits of the dying travel to Cape Reinga where they slip down the roots of the sacred Pohutukawa into the sea, to journey back to their origin in Hawaiki.

Nathaniel Knoef was born on 12 December 1998, as the Pohutukawa flowers were beginning to appear. He died on 2 February 1999 as the same flowers faded, giving way to the seed from which new Pohutukawa would grow. At his birth Nathaniel was diagnosed with incurable health problems and in the few weeks of his life his parents faced many ethical issues associated with his care. Their story clearly highlighted the need ordinary people have for access to support in dealing with the growing number of ethical issues which surround the gift of life.

The naming of New Zealand's national Catholic Bioethics Centre in honour of Nathaniel is a sign of the Centre's commitment to those who are most vulnerable in the complex ethical situations which develop in their lives.

## Thanks

The staff of the Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics wish to thank all their benefactors whose support has been instrumental in the establishment and continued work of the Centre. The Nathaniel Centre for Bioethics is supported by the New Zealand Catholic Bishops' Conference and also relies upon fees for its services, and individual donations for its continued operation and growth.

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