Questions
“For you created my innermost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” Psalm 139 v.13.
“Don’t you know that you yourselves are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him; for God’s temple is sacred, and you are that temple.” 1 Corinthians 3 v 16-17

• What do you understand by the phrase “sanctity of life”?
• In what ways is it a privilege to care for someone at the end of their life?
• What would you say to someone who feels they are a burden to others and therefore wants to end their life ‘with dignity’?
• What emotional and spiritual issues might arise for the close family and friends of those who would choose assisted suicide, both before and after the assisted suicide took place?

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The Right to Die: Secular Approaches

In our society, issues addressing end of life are increasingly approached from an individual perspective. The right to decide to die is argued to be part of our liberty as human beings. This individualistic view of life, coupled with the fear of being maintained alive in a situation of terminal illness with continuous pain, gradual loss of dignity and fear of becoming a burden to their loved ones may have influenced the public’s views on the right to die. Dr Andrew Davies, addressing the BMA in 2006 mentioned that the greatest concern of terminally ill patients under his care, was the fear of becoming an emotional and financial burden to their families.

Dignity in Dying: the Palliative Care Option

An argument often advanced for euthanasia or physician assisted suicide is the fear of pain. However, pharmacological research and practice in the area of pain management is progressing therefore reducing the risk of being in constant pain. The case for death because of inadequate pain management is therefore significantly weakened. Pain management is a significant component within palliative care. Since its inception, palliative care education has used the model of multidisciplinary education.

Palliative care is synonymous with holistic care

A good deal of research evidence indicates that people's spirituality and in particular their religious spirituality can be a great source of help when approaching death. The Christian tradition provides us with structures of hope, meaning and new possibilities even in the midst of pain and suffering. In an age-denying culture such as our own, Christianity enables us to look at growing old and facing death quite differently from the culture around us by offering rituals, prayers, scriptural insight and communities of belonging that embody and live out the belief in the importance of a life well lived as well as life after death. End of life care begins in the day to day life of the Christian community and not simply within the intensity and technical expertise of the medical ward often associated with the end of a person’s life.