

# **New Zealand bishops offer pastoral guidelines in response to euthanasia law**

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (CNS) – New Zealand’s Catholic bishops have prepared guidelines for health professionals, chaplains and priests to assist them in their pastoral work with people who decide to die under the country’s End of Life Choice Act that takes effect Nov. 7.

While the Church opposes the deliberate taking of human life, it cannot turn away people who choose “assisted dying” under the new law, Bishop Stephen Lowe of Hamilton, New Zealand, vice president of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops’ Conference.

The Church must help people view the questions and choices they face through a Christian lens, Bishop Lowe said in a statement released by the bishops’ conference Oct. 28.

“Individuals often find themselves in complex places. In these times, the Church tries to offer guidance to people as best they can, but people make their own choices,” he said.

“Often as a Church, we find ourselves caring for people dealing with the consequences of such choices. Our pastoral practice is always called to be a reflection of our God, who does not abandon his people,” he added.

The bishops prepared a pastoral statement to accompany the guidelines for people who care for the dying. The Church’s Te Kupenga-Catholic Leadership Institute is planning workshops on working with the law.

Catholic leaders opposed a referendum on the law during the country’s 2020 general election. The referendum passed with

65.9% of voters approving the measure.

The guidelines, titled "Ministers of Consolation and Hope," stress accompaniment with those who are dying. The five-page document describes the ministry of accompaniment as a commitment and a ministry of hope and support.

It also said that spiritual accompaniment with someone contemplating euthanasia or assisted dying is "a partnership of good intent," calling for ministers and caregivers to make available resources of care, prayer and the sacraments.

Accompaniment involves working with family members, known as whanau whakapono in Maori and tribal cultures. "Whanau and other loved ones may hold varying views about assisted dying. Any division or tension within the family needs to be listened to and attended to with great sensitivity," the guidelines advise.

In addition, the guidelines clearly explain that accompaniment is "always voluntary and respectful of conscience."

"No priest, chaplain, pastoral worker, health care professional or caregiver should ever feel obliged to do or say something that goes against their own conscience. Any cooperation in the act of facilitating or administering an assisted death must be excluded in all cases," the guidelines said.

Euthanasia will not be offered in Catholic rest homes or hospices, Bishop Lowe said.

"However, it will become available in a number of hospitals and other public care facilities throughout the country. We do not need to deny the objective wrong of euthanasia in order to accompany, with consolation and hope, those who might feel drawn or pushed towards this type of death," the bishop said in his statement.

“The legal availability of euthanasia in New Zealand does not change Catholic convictions about the practice,” his statement continued. “At the same time, 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.”

The New Zealand bishops’ pastoral guidelines can be [found online here](#).