**End of Life Legislation -A Statement by the Victorian Council of Churches**

# At a recent meeting of the Victorian Council of Churches in Victoria it was agreed to release a joint statement on End of Life. ·

With the intent of the State Government of Victoria to introduce legislation in this coming spring session of Parliament, the Victorian Council of Churches recognises that there is considerable community debate and discussion around ‘End of Life’, the breadth of the discussion underscores the far reaching consequences of such legislation.

The Victorian Council of Churches welcomes and encourages open and frank discussion within the community about all aspects of death and dying. They recognise that there is in Australian society a wide range of views and interpretations about end of life.

Whilst a growing proportion of our society claim no faith or allegiances to established forms of religion, many do, reflected in the current Australian Bureau of Statistics data that shows approximately 68% of Victorians claim some form of belief. The Victorian Council of Churches desires that all members of society are heard and their opinions taken into consideration. ·

The Victorian Council of Churches acknowledges that Euthanasia - the deliberate taking of the life of a terminally ill person in order to bring that person's suffering to an end - is illegal in Victoria. However, by virtue of the **Medical Treatment Act 1988** a patient in Victoria can refuse burdensome life-sustaining treatment provided certain conditions are met. Historically, the churches played a constructive role in the development of this legislation and the Council believes it should play a similar role in preserving its integrity.

The Council believes that many Victorians agree with the current legislation which affirms that life should be preserved rather than destroyed and which also upholds the common law right of any individual to refuse medical treatment in certain circumstances.

 Council believes that a way to respond to community concerns on many

 aspects of End of Life, is achieved by enhancing the quality and availability of

 Palliative Care.

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 The issues being currently discussed in our community: dying at place of choice,

 dying in the company of choice, dying with the appropriate cultural and/or religious

 practices and persons present, and the alleviating of unnecessary suffering and pain,

 are concerns that are or can be addressed through optimal palliative care which

 creates the environment to allow End of Life to occur with maximum respect and

 dignity.

 Therefore the Victorian Council of Churches encourages all politicians to take the

 whole of our community into their deliberations as they debate this legislation.