Submission to MSPs in response to the consultation on the End of Life Assistance Bill Members of the Scottish Churches’ Disability Agenda Group (SCDAG) met in plenary session on 13th March, 2010 and overwhelmingly instructed the Executive Committee to prepare a statement which reflected their near unanimous opposition to the End of Life Assistance Bill. We met as a group of individuals who are either disabled or acquainted with disability either through interest or relationship.

Our main concern is to present a Christian response which is reflective of our value of life as disabled people. Our disabilities are many and range from minor impairments to ones which affected our lives greatly and increase our dependency on others to offer assistance to allow us to live independently and as equals in society.

We offer several observations under different headings.

(1) Our Belief in the Sanctity of Life

(a) All Christians assert that God created life and that life belongs to him. We recognise, however, that the sixth commandment, ‘thou shalt not kill’, can result in a fierce debate about its precise meaning.
(b) Nevertheless, we can assert that God always chooses life over death and commands us to do likewise.
(c) Furthermore, we can be assured that he has given us loving relationships in which we can develop compassion and care for each other in difficult times such as facing death.
(d) Finally, we assert that he did not offer men and women absolute autonomy over their lives but set it in the context of relationships which are central to creation and love itself. All problems in life must be solved in relationship with others.

(2) The Protection of Vulnerable People

(a) We believe that once the idea of euthanasia becomes established in the public psyche, it will gradually extend to the vulnerable who may be protected for a while but such protection could easily be eroded.
(b) We are aware that throughout the UK there is a postcode lottery. Some people with life threatening illnesses receive excellent care in one situation and are almost neglected in others. In such situations, there can be a temptation not to strive to prolong life or to resuscitate those who are undergoing a dangerous episode.
(c) The passing of legislation such as that which is proposed may conflict with and complicate the Adults with Incapacities Act.
(3) The Value of Palliative Care

(a) We believe that the Hospice movement can offer considerable dignity in the last days of a person’s life to both the patient and his or her relations and significant others.
(b) There is a great deal of research which shows that people who are faced with terminal illness can find a variety of spiritualities which they may share with there relatives and carers in their dying days.
(c) We believe that the collective decision reached in these dying days will equip people to deal with bereavement in a better way than as the result of the autonomous decision of a person who chooses an assisted death.

For all these reasons, we oppose the End of Life Assistance Bill. We do not do so from a dogmatic stance but rather bear a conviction that the richest way of achieving dignity is through loving relationships which can be best reached and maintained when life is allowed to run its course in a loving environment.

Very Rev’d Sheilagh M Kesting, Honorary President
Barbara Urquhart DCS, Chair
Rev’d Dr W Graham Monteith, Secretary
Scottish Churches’ Disability Agenda Group
26 April 2010