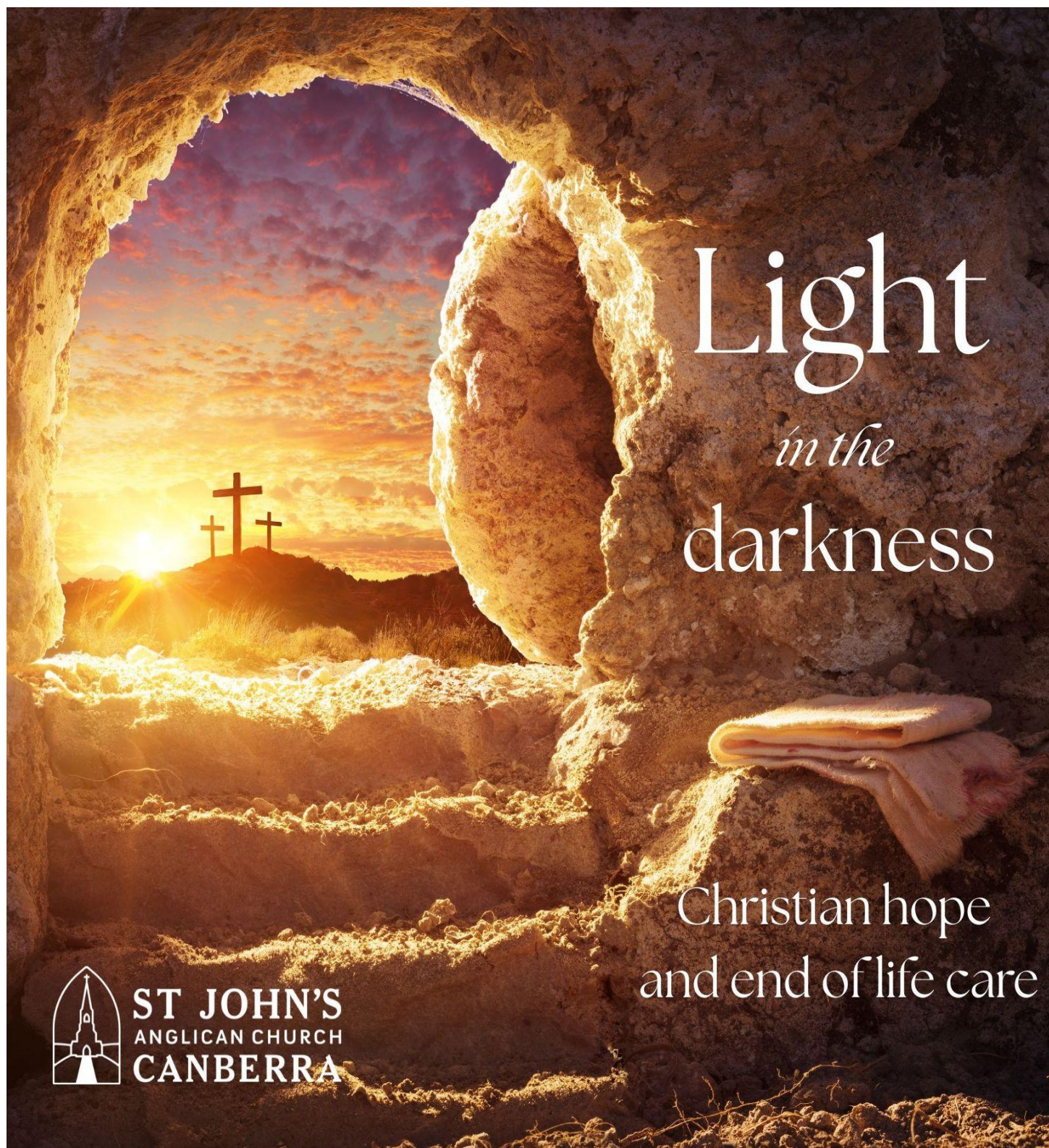




Light *in the* darkness

Christian hope
and end of life care



ST JOHN'S
ANGLICAN CHURCH
CANBERRA

Saturday February 28 2026

9.30am—3.00pm

St John the Baptist Anglican Church Hall, Reid, ACT

www.stjohnscanberra.org

Program

- 9.00am: Tea and coffee (provided)
- 9.30am: **Introduction**
Rev'd Dr Andrew Cameron
- 9.35am: **Welcome and Rationale**
Rev'd David McLennan
- 9.45am: **Living with VAD: the impact on end of life care**
Professor Megan Best
- 10.30am: Morning tea (provided)
- 11.00am: **Christian theology and the end of life**
Rev'd Dr Andrew Cameron
- 11.15am: **Living with VAD: How it affects us**
Professor Megan Best
- 12.00pm: **Q&A/Plenary**
- 12.30pm: Lunch break: BYO or local cafés
- 1.45pm: **Panel Discussion** with pastoral carers
- 3.00pm: Close

Information

Although lunch is not provided, our friends at Catbird Café (across the road, 44 Constitution Avenue, in the Griffin Building) are glad to offer you a **whopping 20% discount!** Say 'I'm with St John's conference' (and maybe mention Taylor). www.catbirdcanberra.com.au

Toilets are at the back of the hall in the foyer (women to the right, men to the left, disability-accessible to the left).

All are welcome to the **Panel Discussion** at 1.45 p.m., which will be more informal. It is mainly for 'pastoral carers': ministers, pastors, chaplains, and anyone working closely with someone who is dying (including family members). The speakers will offer some thoughts then interact with your questions and comments.

During the Q&A, and maybe the Panel Discussion, **text** your comments and questions to **0477 689 421**.

Afterwards you are welcome to **enjoy the St John's precinct**, and to look around inside Canberra's oldest church.

This document includes many URL links. For a **PDF version**, and some other resources, go to tinyurl.com/SJ-LitD or use the QR code →→→

For access to **audio recordings** of the conference talks, see the back page of this booklet.



The conference is proudly supported by Canberra-based livestreaming and AV experts, **attnd.**, who have kindly provided audio-visual support today. St John's often works in partnership with Michael and his team, for weddings, funerals, and other events. For further info go to attnd.com.au or email connect@attnd.com.au.

Thanks also to our caterer Richard from **Sitting Ducks Catering!** www.sittingducks.com.au.

Speakers

Professor Megan Best is Convenor for Bioethics and a senior researcher in the Institute for Ethics and Society (IES) at the University of Notre Dame Australia (UNDA). She has a clinical background in palliative medicine. Her career focus has been on the relief of suffering and care for the vulnerable through high quality research, translation, advocacy, supervision and leadership.

After training in palliative care, she worked as a consultant for state and federal health departments developing palliative care policy for several years before returning to clinical palliative care. She has maintained a life-long interest in developing evidence-based and ethical healthcare policy, contributing to many areas of legislation.

She is known internationally for her work in Christian bioethics, and teaches bioethics at tertiary level at several institutions. Her other professional associations include **CASE** (UNSW); the **Centre for Public Christianity** (CPX); and the Academy of Fellows for **The Center for Bioethics and Human Dignity** at Trinity International University in Illinois, USA. She is also the founding Director of Ethicentre (www.ethicentre.com), an organisation that provides reliable information about Christian bioethics within a biblical framework.

Her research on the spiritual care of patients has influenced the development of training for healthcare professionals internationally. She is currently a member of the Executive for the Spiritual Care Taskforce of the European Association for Palliative Care; and is a past member of the boards for Spiritual Care Australia, the Anglican Defence Force, and the international Joint Research Council for chaplaincy.

See links to some of her publications later in this handout (p. 11).

Rev'd David McLennan is the Rector of St John's Anglican Church. Prior to ordained Christian ministry, David worked for 10 years as a public servant in the Department of Defence (mostly in the Defence Intelligence Organisation) and the Office of National Assessments. He has also served as an infantry soldier, including active service in East Timor in 2000.

He undertook theological study in Sydney and Canberra, and was ordained at Goulburn Cathedral in 2014. His previous post was as Rector of the Parish of St Mary in the Valley in Calwell. Oversight of Canberra's oldest church includes pastoral and teaching duties, oversight of the parish's human services agency, St John's Care (www.stjohnscare.org.au), and management of a heritage site. He also contributes to several Diocesan organisations.

Rev'd Dr Andrew Cameron is the senior associate priest at St John's, and formerly on the faculties of St Mark's National Theological Centre, Barton, and Moore Theological College, Sydney. Andrew has taught ethics from a Christian perspective in a variety of contexts. His written output includes *Joined-up Life: A Christian Account of How Ethics Works* (Nottingham, UK: IVP, 2011); *Living in the Next Phase: developing the theology, practice and ministries of later life* (Sydney: ADM, 2014); and *The Logic of Love: Christian Ethics and Moral Psychology* (London: T&T Clark-Bloomsbury, 2023). He also coordinates St John's occasional seminars in various personal, moral and social issues. For 2026 events (tba), follow our regular newssheet. Sign up for it at www.stjohnscanberra.org).

Short Talk 1. **Welcome and Rationale**

Dave McLennan

Talk 2. Living with VAD: the impact on end of life care

Megan Best

Short Talk 3. **Christian theology and the end of life**

Andrew Cameron

A different moral universe

An ancient moral universe

Augustine's challenge

Formation, formation, formation ...

For an outstanding and readable summary of several philosophical, theological, and social issues surrounding VAD, see:

Andrew Errington, Against "voluntary assisted dying" (Oct. 2021)

<https://ccl.moore.edu.au/resources/against-voluntary-assisted-dying-andrew-errington/>

Talk 4. Living with VAD: How it affects us

Megan Best

Further Notes. **Q&A and Panel Discussion**

Text your questions and comments to 0477 689 421.

Resources

Legislation. All healthcare workers are encouraged to download and read the relevant VAD legislation for the jurisdictions in which they work. The ACT Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2024 can be accessed at <https://www.legislation.act.gov.au/a/2024-24>.

Implementation of each jurisdiction's legislation is overseen by the relevant health department. A summary of each jurisdiction's legislation and links to the state implementation websites can be found at <https://end-of-life.qut.edu.au/assisteddying> (this is a pro-VAD organisation.) In the ACT, start at <https://www.act.gov.au/health/end-of-life-and-palliative-care/accessing-voluntary-assisted-dying-in-the-act>. ACT Health also provides guidelines to clinicians, pharmacists, others.

On understanding patients' stated desire for hastened death:
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28965095>

On spiritual suffering:
<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pon.3795>

On spiritual care:
Best MC, Vivat B, Gijssberts M-J. 'Spiritual Care in Palliative Care.' *Religions*. 2023; 14(3):320.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14030320> or
<https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/14/3/320>

This paper contains a summary of the meaning, importance and practice of spiritual care at the end of life. See summary overleaf.

Megan C Best (ed.) *Spiritual Care in Palliative Care: what it is and why it matters*. Springer, 2024.
<https://url.au.m.mimecastprotect.com/s/TDEzCNLJ89UMGVmgtji pCyIXcR?domain=link.springer.com>

An international panel of experts provide a comprehensive guide to spiritual care in palliative care settings, combining spirituality research with practical applications.

Peter L. Hudson *et al.* Responding to desire to die statements from patients with advanced disease: recommendations for health professionals. *Palliative Care*. 2006; 20(7): 703–710

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0269216306071814>

(This paper has restricted access. Following is a summary of its recommendations.)

It is not uncommon for patients with advanced incurable disease to express a desire to hasten their death. Health professionals often have difficulty responding to such statements, and find it challenging to ascertain why these statements are made. Health professionals may struggle to determine whether a ‘desire to die’ statement (DTDS) is about a request for hastened death, a sign of psychosocial distress, or merely a passing comment that is not intended to be heard literally as a death wish. This paper gives recommendations for responding to a DTDS, underpinned by key principles of therapeutic communication and a systematic review of empirical literature.

1. Be alert to your own responses

Be aware that your response can shape the communication; eg if you convey impatience or your own feelings of futility, this may have a negative effect or it may limit the conversation to follow.

Show regard for the person by your verbal and non-verbal behaviour

2. Be open to hearing concerns

Ask questions that gently probe emotional concerns.

Be alert to verbal and non-verbal signs of psychological distress.

Encourage the person, by sensitive prompting where necessary, to express their feelings.

Listen actively without interrupting, seek clarification of feelings and concerns.

Acknowledge the feeling/s being expressed without needing to actively support the desire to die: try to match the words you use with the level of emotion the person is experiencing.

Use silence appropriately; do not rush to fill gaps in the conversation.

Sit quietly through tears.

Express empathy, both by your verbal and non-verbal responses.

Acknowledge there are individual differences in patients' emotional responses to the impact of life-threatening illness

3. Assessing the potential contributing factors

For example, check whether the person has appropriate social support, what type and level of assistance may be required.

Assess for psychological distress (eg depression/anxiety) and/or existential distress.

Assess for delirium, cognitive change and competence.

Assess level of understanding regarding goals of care and treatment options.

Assess for unrelieved physical symptoms – consider referral to palliative care.

Assess for interpersonal factors (eg family conflict, conflict with clinical staff).

4. Responding to specific issue/s

Address potentially reversible causes and develop plan of management.

Commence planning strategies (eg referral, another meeting) for issues that cannot readily be resolved.

5. Concluding the discussion

Summarize main points of discussion; checking your perceptions with the patient's perceptions.

Ask if there is anything else the patient wants to discuss or if they have any other questions to raise.

Offer assistance to discuss the patient's situation with others, eg in a family meeting.

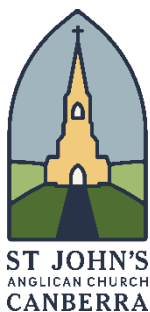
Indicate your availability for contact to address any questions or concerns and arrange for further appointment to review situation.

Explain that it is important for you to let the other members of the treatment team know about this discussion and reassure them that it will be treated in the strictest confidence within the team.

6. After discussion

Document discussion in medical records.

Advise other members of the treatment team, so they can also support the patient.



Services at St John's

Regular Sunday Services

8.00 am: Sung Eucharist

9.30 am: Sung Eucharist

*+Kids' and Youth Church in school terms;
livestream option for families in Robertson Room*

6.00 pm: stjohs@6, contemporary

Additional Services

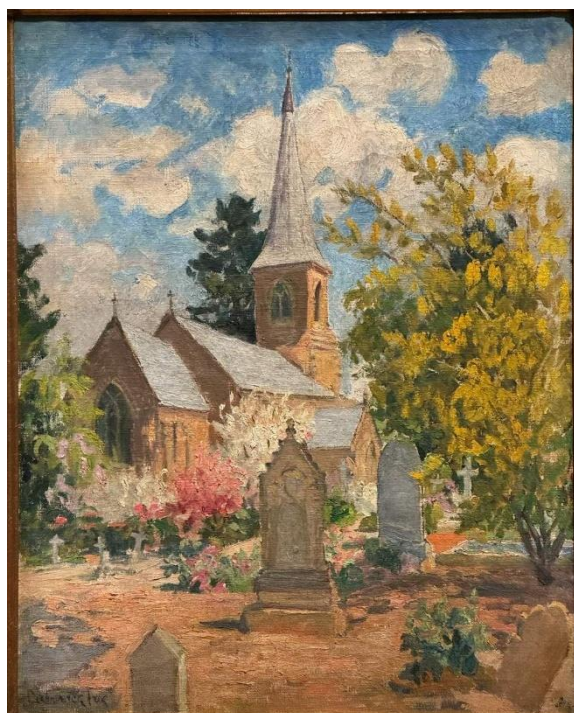
using 1662 Book of Common Prayer (BCP)

7am (Eucharist): Second and Fourth Sundays of month

11.15am (Eucharist): First Sunday of month

5pm (Choral Evensong): Second Sunday of month

10am (Eucharist): Every Wednesday



*St John's from the east
Ethel Carrick Fox*

Catch up with the conference
and our other talks
via **podcast**

Go to Apple, Spotify, or Pocketcasts
and search for

St John's Canberra Talks



or use a QR code:

Spotify



Apple



Pocketcasts



or on your computer:

<https://open.spotify.com/show/2qEZrZB7k5aUQTriTwN18W>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/st-johns-canberra-talks/id1785757914>

<https://play.pocketcasts.com/discover/podcast/08a5a0b0-967a-013d-f7f5-0e51c9cdac59>