

Churchgoer pleads guilty to smothering terminal cancer patient as an 'act of mercy'

By Martin Evans, Crime Correspondent

A TERMINALLY ill pensioner was murdered by a member of his church congregation who believed she was ending his suffering, a court has been told.

Heather Davidson, 53, smothered David Paterson, 81, at the private care home where he was living, after ringing Macmillan Cancer Support to tell them what she was about to do.

Appearing at Teesside Crown Court, Davidson, who was not related to Mr Paterson, sobbed in the dock as she pleaded guilty to murder.

The case was adjourned for sentencing, when she is expected to plead for leniency on the grounds that she believed she was carrying out an act of mercy.

Mr Paterson, a retired welder, was described as a devoted family man, who had enjoyed the simple pleasures of life.

He had been a carer to his wife until her death in March 2014, after which he had become ill himself.

After being diagnosed with terminal cancer he was admitted to the Sowerby House care home in Thirsk, North Yorks, where he had lived.

In his final weeks he had become too ill to attend his local church and Davidson became a regular visitor to the nursing home.

But on Feb 11 it was alleged that she entered his room and smothered him using a pillow.

While his family were understood to have been prepared for the end, they were still horrified at Davidson's actions because Mr Paterson had planned a dignified end for himself.

A source close to the case said: "He had made his peace with God and was preparing to die with dignity when his life was ended prematurely."

In a statement issued at the time of his



David Paterson, a retired welder, was found dead at his care home

death, Mr Paterson's family said: "He was a devoted family man who adored his nieces and nephews.

"He was devoted to his wife and cared for her when she became ill, up until her death in March 2014.

"They were a very private couple who idolised their family and enjoyed being a part of their local community."

The statement added: "He was an active member of his local church and enjoyed bowling until his health deteriorated and he was no longer fit enough.

"We will remember David as a devoted husband and family man who enjoyed

the simple pleasures in life." Addressing Mr Paterson's family, who were in the public gallery for the hearing, the judge, Simon Bourne-Arton QC, said: "I hope that after sentencing on June 5 you will have closure."

He told Davidson: "You will be given credit for the plea of guilty. You have had the very good sense to come to that view and you will be given credit for it.

"However, when it comes to deciding the length of the minimum term I impose I will be assisted by a report from a probation officer who will come to see you."

D. Tel. May 6 2015