



Yesterday, we were at Saint Joseph's Oratory in Montreal to celebrate the Year of Consecrated Life. The Oratory is a special place of prayer, inspired by the city's own Saint Brother André Bessette who brought healing and hope to those in need. It honours Joseph, husband of Mary, Mother of Jesus. We venerate Saint Joseph as patron of Canada, and also as patron of a good death because he had Jesus and Mary at his side to comfort him in his dying. There in this sanctuary, where so many have found healing and consolation, we gave thanks for the thousands of women and men from all across our land who have given their lives to their brothers and sisters through prayer, health care, education, and other works of service and solidarity with the poor and marginalized.

Moved by the powerful example of their generosity and how they have promoted and protected human dignity in the many sectors of society, we affirm our nation's long tradition of caring for the sick and the vulnerable. We cannot but express our outrage at the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada to create a new "constitutional right" in Canada, the so-called "right" to suicide. Nor can we suppress our profound dismay, disappointment and disagreement with the Court's decision. The ruling would legalize an action that, from time immemorial, has been judged immoral: the taking of innocent life. Moreover, it puts at risk the lives of the vulnerable, the depressed, those with physical or mental illness, and those with disabilities.

In the face of the terrible suffering that can be caused by illnesses or depression, a truly human response should be to care, not to kill. Likewise, the response to the anguish and fear people can experience at the end of their lives is to be present to them, offering palliative care, not intentionally to cause their death. The need for palliative care should be one of the most pressing preoccupations of our country and its institutions. This is where the energies and resources of our elected leaders should be directed. This is why we advocate making high-quality palliative care, long-term care, and home care easily accessible to all Canadians.

We are in the midst of a federal election campaign. The candidates' silence on the question of assisted suicide astonishes us. This question is fundamental for our society and its future. Have

we relinquished the ability to debate the profound questions of life that touch us all? Are our politicians that terrified by the risk of awkwardly phrased responses, getting "off message", or the ups and downs of public opinion polls? We urge all the citizens of our country to raise this question of life and death at meetings with candidates, to stimulate a true debate worthy of our great country.

The one-year period given by the Supreme Court is far too short for such a fundamental change in our laws to enter into force. We urge the government that is elected on October 19 to invoke the Notwithstanding Clause and extend this timeline to five years. If ever a legal decision warranted invoking this clause in our Constitution, this is it. We need to allow ourselves time to reflect before acting, time to consider seriously the consequences of our actions in dealing with this crucial moral issue.

Furthermore, we must at all cost uphold and protect the conscience rights of the men and women who work as caregivers. Requiring a physician to kill a patient is always unacceptable. It is an affront to the conscience and vocation of the health-care provider to require him or her to collaborate in the intentional putting to death of a patient, even by referring the person to a colleague. The respect we owe our physicians in this regard must be extended to all who are engaged in health care and work in our society's institutions.

As Catholic Bishops, we speak in terms that are informed by reason, ethical dialogue, religious conviction and profound respect for the dignity of the human person. Our awareness is shaped by thousands of years of reflection, and by our actions as Christians in following Jesus. He showed most fully what it means to love, to serve, and to be present to others. His response to the suffering of others was to suffer with them, not to kill them! He accepted suffering in his life as the pathway to giving, to generosity, to mercy. One does not have to be a believer to recognize in Jesus' life and action a supreme example of humanity. The values of Jesus of Nazareth are the basis for our views on assisted suicide. Canada has nothing to fear in committing itself to these profoundly human and life-giving values.

It is in this spirit of collaboration in building a society more compassionate, more respectful of the dignity of all human life, more just and more generous that we make this heartfelt cry. Remembering the humble witness of Saint Brother André, we invite all Canadians to build a society that respects the dignity of every person. May our call be heard with respect, attention and openness.

**The Catholic Bishops of Canada**  
**September 18, 2015**

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