



**THE POSITION OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH
AND THE STANCE OF THE CATHOLIC BISHOPS OF CANADA
ON ‘THE GIVING OF ASSISTANCE IN DYING’**

**Submission by the President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops
to the Expert Panel on Options for a Legislative Response to *Carter v. Canada***

1. On the common good, the Catholic Church believes and teaches:

“The common good consists of three essential elements: respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members. The dignity of the human person requires the pursuit of the common good. Everyone should be concerned to create and support institutions that improve the conditions of human life. It is the role of the state to defend and promote the common good of civil society...” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, nn. 1925-27

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 humanity’s 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. Similar values are shared not only by other Christians but also other world religions as well as men and women of goodwill without religious faith.

At the Plenary Assembly of our Conference this past September, we, the Eastern Catholic and Roman Catholic Bishops of Canada, made what we described as a heartfelt cry (a copy of our September statement is attached). Consequent to our previous individual and collective statements over the past years, we reiterated our continued opposition to efforts to implement any form of euthanasia and assisted suicide. As we did then, so we do again, in a spirit of collaboration with all our fellow citizens, in building a society which will prove to be more compassionate, more respectful of the dignity of all human life, more just and more generous. As Catholic Bishops, we invite all Canadians to build a society that respects the dignity of every person.

2. On the moral and social evil of assisted suicide, the Catholic Church believes and teaches:

“Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God....” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2277

“Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self. It likewise offends love of neighbor because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God.” –Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2281

“Intentional euthanasia, whatever its forms or motives, is murder.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2324

“Suicide is seriously contrary to justice, hope, and charity.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2325

During our annual Plenary Assembly, we, the Catholic Bishops of our country, expressed 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. We again stated 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. 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.

3. On the current imperative of palliative care, the Catholic Church believes and teaches:

“The fruits of charity are joy, peace, and mercy; charity demands beneficence and fraternal correction; it is benevolence; it fosters reciprocity and remains disinterested and generous; it is friendship and communion....” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1829

“Those whose lives are diminished or weakened deserve special respect. Sick or handicapped persons should be helped to lead lives as normal as possible.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2276

“Every human life, from the moment of conception until death, is sacred because the human person has been willed for its own sake in the image and likeness of the living and holy God.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 2319

The Catholic Bishops of our land give thanks for the thousands of women and men from all across our land who assist others by their concern and prayers and through 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 promote and protect human dignity in the many sectors of society, we again affirm our nation's long tradition of caring for the sick and the vulnerable. 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 and the Expert Panel should be directed. This is why we advocate making high-quality palliative care, long-term care, and home care easily accessible to all Canadians.

A few years ago, there was almost unanimous agreement among all members of Parliament on the urgent priority of palliative care, as outlined in the November 2011 report by the Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, *Not to be Forgotten: Care of Vulnerable Canadians* (see Executive Summary, Part –1. Palliative and end-of-life care)¹:

Our health care system is good at short term acute care but less so at dealing with people with chronic conditions, with serious pain, with mental health concerns, or with the psycho-social and spiritual needs of patients and their families surrounding the dying process.

People with chronic conditions need holistic care that looks at them as a whole person. They require patient centered care that recognizes their individual needs and not those of the bureaucratic system, as most important. They require integrated continual care that does not allow them to become lost in a fragmented and confusing world of multiple siloed health systems with less than satisfactory inter-communication between them.

4. On protecting the vulnerable, the Catholic Church believes and teaches:

“The person represents the ultimate end of society.... Respect for the human person entails respect for the rights that flow from his dignity as a creature. These rights are prior to society and must be recognized by it.... Respect for the human person proceeds by way of respect for the principle that ‘everyone should look upon his neighbor (without any exception) as “another self,” above all bearing in mind his life and the means necessary for living it with dignity...’ The duty of making oneself a neighbor to others and actively serving them becomes even more urgent when it involves the disadvantaged, in whatever area this may be.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, nn. 1929-32

¹ The definition of palliative care which is used in the report is that from the World Health Organization (WHO). The report by the Parliamentary Committee also calls for a National Suicide Prevention Strategy. Neither the WHO definition of palliative care, nor that used by Health Canada, includes assisted suicide or euthanasia.

This question is fundamental for our society and its future. The ruling by the Supreme Court of Canada puts at risk the lives of the vulnerable, the depressed, those with physical or mental illness, and those with disabilities. 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. The Bishops of Canada have unanimously agreed to 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.

5. On safeguarding freedom of conscience and religion, the Catholic Church believes and teaches:

“Freedom is exercised in relationships between human beings. Every human person, created in the image of God, has the natural right to be recognized as a free and responsible being. All owe to each other this duty of respect. The right to the exercise of freedom, especially in moral and religious matters, is an inalienable requirement of the dignity of the human person. This right must be recognized and protected by civil authority within the limits of the common good and public order.” – Catechism of the Catholic Church, n. 1738

It is the conviction of all the Bishops of Canada, together with the other clergy and members of the consecrated life, united with our Catholic faithful, that our country 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 well as to the individual institutions themselves.²

As Bishops of the Catholic Church, we are united with Pope Francis in his concerns about our “throw-away culture” and its fascination with “quick fixes” and “technical solutions”. His following words in his recent Encyclical *Laudato Si’* (paragraphs 46 and 70) apply in so many ways to the question of euthanasia and assisted suicide, even when disguised in misleading phrases such as “assisted dying”:

The social dimensions of global change include the effects of technological innovations on employment, social exclusion, an inequitable distribution and consumption of energy and other services, social breakdown, increased violence and

² According to an online survey by the Canadian Medical Association this summer, 63% of the 1,407 physicians who replied said they would not provide physician-assisted suicide. Also this summer, palliative care centres in Quebec announced they will not offer physician-assisted suicide if it should become legal in the province.

a rise in new forms of social aggression, drug trafficking, growing drug use by young people, and the loss of identity. These are signs that the growth of the past two centuries has not always led to an integral development and an improvement in the quality of life. Some of these signs are also symptomatic of real social decline, the silent rupture of the bonds of integration and social cohesion.

Disregard for the duty to cultivate and maintain a proper relationship with my neighbour, for whose care and custody I am responsible, ruins my relationship with my own self, with others, with God and with the earth. When all these relationships are neglected, when justice no longer dwells in the land, the Bible tells us that life itself is endangered.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas Crosby". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

(Most Rev.) Douglas Crosby, OMI
Bishop of Hamilton and
President of the Canadian Conference of
Catholic Bishops

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The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops is the national assembly of the Roman Catholic and Eastern Catholic Bishops. As its principal pastors who officially speak on behalf of the Church in Canada, the Bishops are the spiritual leaders and teachers of more than thirteen million Canadian Catholics. Forty-six per cent of Canadians are baptized Catholics.