



Catholics are called by their faith to assist all those in need, particularly the poor, the suffering and the dying. Comforting the dying and accompanying them in love and solidarity has been considered by the Church since its beginning a principal expression of Christian mercy.

Helping someone commit suicide, however, is neither an act of justice or mercy, nor is it part of palliative care. The decision of the Supreme Court of Canada today does not change Catholic teaching. "[A]n 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, our Creator." (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2277).

The Bishops of our country invite Canadians, especially Catholics, to do all they can to bring comfort and support for all those who are dying and for their loved ones, so that no one, because of loneliness, vulnerability, loss of autonomy, or fear of pain and suffering, feels they have no choice but to commit suicide. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops will continue to [promote](#) palliative and home care, and to encourage all the faithful to work for the betterment of the elderly, the disabled, the ill, and those who are socially isolated.

My brother Bishops and I entreat governments and courts to interpret today's judgment in its narrowest terms, resisting any calls to go beyond this to so-called acts of "mercy killing" and euthanasia. We again call on provincial and territorial governments to ensure good-quality palliative care in all their jurisdictions. We also urge governments and professional associations to implement policies and guidelines which ensure respect for the freedom of conscience of all health-care workers as well as administrators who will not and cannot accept suicide as a medical solution to pain and suffering.

+ Paul-André Durocher

Archbishop of Gatineau
President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops

6 February 2015

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Letter from the CCCB President to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada on assisted suicide

Friday, May 22 2015

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Dear Minister,

Further to the ruling of the Supreme Court of Canada [this past February 6](#), the Catholic Bishops of Canada welcomed the announcement you made in media interviews last month when you said that the federal government will soon reveal details of its public consultations regarding new legislation on assisted suicide. More recently, my brother Bishops and I also noted media reports a few weeks ago which quoted you as saying that the consultation, "while not formally announced, has begun."



Our Church and our Conference are deeply concerned about the implications of the Court's ruling. The classic words of the Hippocratic Oath bind medical practitioners to keep patients "from harm and injustice", and not to "give a deadly drug to anybody who asked for it" nor to "make a suggestion to this effect". The Court's ruling not only erodes society's appreciation for human life, but also the trust and confidence all people, particularly those most vulnerable, should have in medical personnel and health-care institutions to protect their lives. Moreover, as the Court itself has noted, Parliament, as well as provincial legislatures and colleges of physicians, now need to follow up on preventing this ruling from impacting the Charter rights of physicians, and on what is now an urgent need to protect all health-care workers and managers from being compelled to provide, or be involved in, physician-assisted suicide.

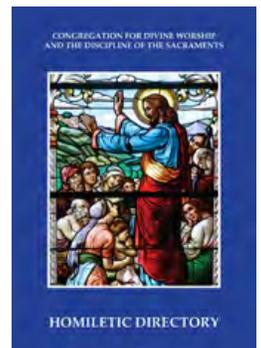
Catholics have an enduring commitment to and involvement in health care. Our country today benefits from the services of many Catholic health-care institutions, and a large proportion of what are today provincially operated hospitals originated through the work and dedication of Catholic religious communities, some of these institutions dating to the very beginnings of what is today Canada. Even outside Catholic facilities, a large number of dedicated men and women who belong to the Catholic Church are part of the health-care professions. Compassion and care for the sick, the dying and those socially and economically vulnerable is a principal work of mercy for our Church. Together with the leaders and members of many other faith communities, we too are deeply troubled by the Supreme Court ruling and concerned about the possible implications of any new legislation that will be developed in view of implementing that ruling.

Our Conference respectfully requests that it be among those to be consulted by the Government of Canada on this question, both in terms of ensuring that the law offers the greatest protection possible to the lives and health of all, and that it also ensures complete protection for the rights and freedom of conscience of health-care workers and managers. We would greatly appreciate having more information from you at your earliest convenience about when and how the public consultations will be underway, as well as on how we can best go about being part of the reflections and discussions on this question which are already being, or are about to be, conducted by the Department of Justice or other federal government ministries.

Thank you, Mr. MacKay, for your consideration to our request. My brother Bishops and I look forward to your response. We also assure you of our prayers as you help our nation in responding to the Court's most troubling ruling.

Sincerely in Our Lord,

+Paul-André Durocher
 Archbishop of Gatineau
 President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops



Message by the CCCB President on the consecrated life



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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