

# Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Faithful on the Legalization of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia

*“Those who are weak have great difficulty finding their place in our society. The image of the ideal human as powerful and capable disenfranchises the old, the sick, the less-abled.” - Jean Vanier*

July 13, 2015

Dear Catholic Faithful of Saskatchewan,

At this critical moment in our nation’s history, our faith in Jesus Christ impels us – as the Catholic bishops exercising ministry in Saskatchewan – to reach out to Catholics and invite all to focus attention on the vital issue of legalizing assisted suicide and euthanasia.

On February 6, 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada overturned the existing laws against assisted suicide, giving Parliament one year to write a new law. This is of grave concern to all of us. In particular, we must consider how this decision will impact the most vulnerable among us – including our elderly, those who are dying, and our sisters and brothers who live with disabilities or mental illness. We also face threats to freedom of conscience and religion, particularly for medical professionals who may be pressured to act against their calling as healers.

Euphemisms such as “medical aid in dying”, “assisted death”, and “dying with dignity” attempt to hide the fact that euthanasia is the deliberate taking of someone’s life, and that assisted suicide intentionally provides someone with the knowledge or means to complete suicide.

*“We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.”*

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #2280

Eliminating a life is not an appropriate response to suffering. Instead, we urge the promotion of quality palliative and end-of-life care. Our Catholic faith promotes the sanctity of life, the common good, and a culture of life in which each human being is protected, and every person feels responsible for the care and the well-being of others until their natural death.

It is important to note that when we are patients, we already have the right to refuse medical treatments we consider burdensome. We are *not* required to do everything possible to stay alive as long as possible. Also, giving patients enough medication to provide pain relief is *not* euthanasia, even if the higher dose might unintentionally shorten the patient’s life. The *intent* is to reduce suffering rather than to hasten death, unlike assisted suicide and euthanasia whose intent is to kill the patient.

In promoting the dignity of the human person, our Church also defends the freedom of conscience of all people, whatever their religion or philosophy of life. With proposed new policies by professional associations that could limit the freedom of conscience of healthcare professionals, it is urgent and vital for all of us to stand united in defense of those who have accepted the call to serve as healers.

We encourage the Catholic faithful and all Canadians to respond courageously to the challenges posed by the Supreme Court’s ruling, by raising their voices in defense of the life and the human dignity of all persons, especially the most vulnerable. As Saint John Paul II exhorted us, “Be not afraid!”

We also offer some suggestions for action:

- Urge the federal government to take all the time necessary to carry out thorough consultations, to ensure that new legislation on physician-assisted suicide is as restrictive as possible.
- Call on governments and professional associations to implement regulations and policies that ensure respect for the freedom of conscience of all health-care professionals who cannot accept killing as a solution to pain and suffering.
- Participate in the second round of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan's public consultation on their new conscientious objection policy (deadline to provide feedback to <https://www.cps.sk.ca> is Aug. 7). For more information on this consultation, please see the Christian Medical and Dental Society of Canada website at [www.cmdscanada.org](http://www.cmdscanada.org).
- Support Catholic physicians, nurses, health professionals and administrators as they stand up for their faith in the face of changing circumstances and new demands.
- Press for improved access to palliative care, including proper pain and symptom management, offering real choices that reduce suffering, rather than end life. Instead of hastening death for Canadians who are ill or dying, we must support them with high quality palliative care, which offers a wholistic healing experience for them and for their families.

In the Gospels we see Jesus' compassionate care for the sick and the suffering. As followers of Jesus Christ, we too are called to serve the vulnerable and the voiceless, by caring for the well-being of the whole person. Pope Francis reminds us that, "Truly, the Gospel of the marginalized is where our credibility is at stake, is found and is revealed!" Exercising our responsibility as Christians to act on our concerns about these vitally important matters will encourage the development of health and social policies that are consistent with social justice teachings.

*The King will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."*

Matthew 25:40

Our Lord came into the world to bring life and healing: "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full" (John 10:10). We encourage each of you to develop your understanding of the impact of the legalization of assisted suicide and euthanasia. We affirm with deep gratitude and encourage with genuine care all who work to uphold the value of human life and dignity from conception to natural death. All human life deserves respect and protection. We share a common responsibility to serve the sick and the aged, not only by attending to physical illnesses, but also by caring for the well-being of the whole person, in imitation of Christ the Healer.

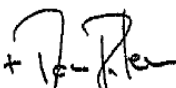
Yours sincerely in Christ,



Most Rev. Daniel J. Bohan,  
Archbishop of Regina



Most Rev. Albert Thévenot  
Bishop of Prince Albert



Most Rev. Donald Bolen  
Bishop of Saskatoon



Most Rev. Bryan Bayda  
Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon



Most Rev. Murray Chatlain  
Archbishop of Keewatin-Le Pas