



Archdiocese of Winnipeg

Office of the Archbishop

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Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

I write to you regarding a matter of great concern. In their recent Plenary Assembly, the Catholic Bishops of Canada expressed their disappointment and outrage at the decision of the Supreme Court of Canada to create a new constitutional right for a person to commit suicide and request that a physician provide this service. This ruling would legalize an action that from time immemorial, has been judged immoral. Indeed previous attempts to pass a bill in the national parliament, to legalize physician assisted suicide or euthanasia, have been rejected by our Members of Parliament. This objection to Physician Assisted Suicide has now been overridden by the Supreme Court, a small unelected body of judges. Our Catholic Faith has always held that: *"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 neighbour because it unjustly breaks 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, #2281) In addition the Church reminds us that: *"Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of the disabled, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable. Thus an act or an 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."* (CCC 2277)

The question of Physician Assisted Suicide has caused great concern among many people, not just Catholics, including many medical providers and people living with disabilities. Just a few years ago, there was almost unanimous agreement among members of parliament that palliative care was a matter of urgent concern in Canada. Physician Assisted Suicide represents a contradiction relative to the palliative care philosophy which seeks to provide patient centered care that recognizes individual needs until the natural end of life and not to submit vulnerable persons to the needs of a bureaucratic system that regards costs and efficiencies as the main priority.

The period of decision making on Physician Assisted Suicide is far too short for an issue as important as this. The Supreme Court demands that there be a law drafted by February 6th, 2016, regulating the practice of Physician Assisted Suicide in Canada. There is a serious need for an extension to this so that a much wider consultation and discussion in Canada can occur. The Canadian Bishops, among many other concerned people in our country, are asking that the new Canadian government invoke the Notwithstanding Clause, thus extending the timeline for legislative decisions to five years. I ask each one of you to consider signing a petition asking the government to use the constitutional right of invoking the Notwithstanding Clause to extend the Supreme Court's timeline for five years. The Petition also asks for the protection of conscience rights of medical providers relative to referrals. We also advocate Palliative Care be more available for all Canadians. I will be speaking to each one of our members of parliament within the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and will ask each one to present our petition to parliament.

Yours in Christ,

✠Richard Gagnon
Archbishop of Winnipeg