



Statement by the President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops on the approval of Bill C-14 legalizing euthanasia and assisted suicide

The recent approval of Bill C-14, which legalizes euthanasia and assisted suicide in our country, stands as an appalling landmark decision to the utter failure of government, and indeed all society, to care truly, authentically and humanely for the suffering and vulnerable in our midst.

We live in a country where the vast majority of the dying cannot access quality palliative or home care, where rates of suicide in many Indigenous communities are staggeringly high, and where it is suggested that the lives of vulnerable, chronically ill and disabled persons are not worth living. Paradoxically, and most unfortunately, our society has now enshrined in law that killing is a respectable way to end suffering. Our country's growing inability to recognize the sanctity of human life is staggering and deeply troubling.

No institution, person, ideology or legislation is entitled to threaten or undermine the sacredness of both the dignity of each individual person and the very gift of life itself. We are called, as a community of compassionate individuals, to respect and protect the continuum of life from conception to natural death, honouring a vision of the human person in his/her present earthly existence as well as life beyond the grave. Catholics and indeed all people of good will have a moral and societal obligation to protect the vulnerable, comfort the suffering, and accompany the dying. The Bishops of Canada hope and pray that with all our Catholic brothers and sisters and our fellow Canadians, each of us and our society may experience a greater conversion of heart so as to recognize the image of God so profoundly imprinted on every human life, whatever that person's state, level of comfort or degree of productivity and societal contribution.

The intentional taking of any human life – be it an elderly person, a child, a vulnerable adult, an embryo, a dying person – is truly a grave and morally unjustifiable act. Our society needs to reject all offenses against life itself: murder, genocide, suicide, abortion, euthanasia, and physician-assisted dying. The purposeful termination of human life via a direct intervention is not a humane action whatsoever. We ought to look instead to minimizing the pain and suffering of the dying and those who are tempted to end their lives, not eradicate their existence. Let us strive to help the sick and incapacitated find meaning in their lives, even and especially in the midst of their suffering. Let us comfort those facing terminal illness or chronic conditions through our genuine presence, human love and medical assistance. Let us, as a society and as individuals, choose to walk with them, in their suffering, not contribute to eliminating the gift of life.

Declaring physician-assisted suicide a “right” is not true caring and not humane in the least. It is ultimately a false act of mercy, a distortion of kindness to our fellow man/woman. The new legislation seems to insinuate that a human being, a person, ceases to be a person and loses his/her very dignity simply because of a loss or diminishment of a number of physical and

mental capacities. It is untrue. What is true is that our own humanity is weakened when we fail to care for the weak and dying, and when we purposefully fall short of considering them, with all their ailments and limitations, as persons worthy of life. True human compassion invites us to share the other's pain, the other's journey – it is not meant to do away with the person. Physician-assisted suicide is an affront to what is most noble, most precious in the human endeavour and a grave injustice and violation of the dignity of every human person whose natural and inherent inclination is indeed the preservation of life. We ought to surround our sick and dying, our vulnerable and disabled, with love and attention, with care and true life-giving compassion. This is why palliative care continues to be undeniably the only moral, effective and much needed alternative, the only compassionate choice, now that our country has embarked upon this perilous road.

Saint Joseph, patron of Canada and patron of a good death, pray for us.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Douglas Crosby".

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

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