

Declare and Resolve

Christian Leaders Statement 2023

As leaders of evangelical churches, ministries and institutions, we declare and resolve the following:

We lament hastened death in Canada. We grieve the expansion in law that has made those whose death is not reasonably foreseeable eligible for hastened death, and that soon will include people with mental illness as their only underlying medical condition.

We are deeply distraught by the stories of persons who are opting for hastened death because they are not receiving adequate care or cannot afford to live. The law requires those seeking assisted death to be informed of means available to relieve their suffering, but the system is not obligated to provide necessary treatment or ensure it is available in a timely manner.

For too many Canadians, the availability of high-quality palliative care is not a reality. For too many Canadians who live with disability, chronic illness or mental illness, appropriate support and care is difficult to access. Too many experience poverty, food or housing insecurity. And for too many Canadians who struggle with their mental health, help is at the end of a months- or years-long waiting list. Our system seems more determined to ensure access to hastened death than to supportive care.

A recent government report indicates that over 86% of those seeking assistance to die do so because of the lack of meaningful activities and not due to physical pain. This is not what the Supreme Court of Canada envisioned when it allowed a limited exemption to the universal ban on assisted suicide, at the risk of undermining our societal commitment to the inviolability of human life.

Ours is the country of universal medicare; the promise is that everyone, regardless of means or circumstances, receives high quality health care. Yet we now offer death to those who cannot afford or cannot access the care they need, the ultimate two-tier health care system so many decry. Is this what we want our society to become? Attempted suicide was decriminalized decades ago not to sanction the act but to ensure that those choosing death were cared for and not punished.

As followers of Jesus, we share a deep and profound commitment to the sanctity of all human life. Human life is being devalued and discarded when people in vulnerable situations among us are not being supported to live, but facilitated to die. How then will we respond?

We affirm

- The love that God has for all persons, the sanctity of human life, and the inviolable dignity of each and every human being, regardless of age, ability, illness, or social condition;
- The duty of care we owe to one another, to our neighbours, regardless of who they are or the circumstances they face;
- The appropriate response to suffering is to offer love, care, and comfort;
- The importance of holistic care and the provision of pain control as well psychological, spiritual, and emotional support.

We advocate

- For universally accessible, high-quality palliative care for those facing life-limiting diagnosis or nearing death;
- For accessible and adequate services and support for Canadians living with disability, chronic illness or mental illness, including safe, secure and affordable housing;
- For better home care and extended care;
- For the protection of conscience for those who cannot accept hastened death as a form of medical care.

We commit

- To demonstrate the love of God in the lives of those feeling abandoned and without hope;
- To mobilize our communities to care for and comfort those who are suffering and alone, in their neighbourhoods, towns and cities;
- To ensure people with disability, chronic illness and mental health struggles are welcomed into full participation and belonging in our churches and communities.

This we affirm, advocate, and commit as followers of Jesus and children of a loving God who called us to love Him and our neighbours as ourselves, affirming all of us are created in His image and of inestimable worth.

May we so live.

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