

August 7, 2015



**HEALTH** - Saskatchewan's bishops are urging the province's Catholics to raise their voices in defence of life and human dignity for all.

The bishops, in a Pastoral Letter to the Catholic Faithful on the Legalization of Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia, encourage Catholics to follow St. John Paul's exhortation to "Be not afraid" in standing up for the most vulnerable in society.

"All human life deserves respect and protection," the bishops write in their July 13 letter. "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."

The letter comes as Canadian politicians struggle to come up with a new law on assisted suicide and euthanasia. The Supreme Court of Canada in February struck down the current laws banning the practice and gave Parliament a year to write a new law.

The bishops are urging 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."

Catholics are called by the bishops to support Catholic health care workers "as they stand up for their faith in the face of changing circumstances and new demands" while also pressing for improved access to palliative care and "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 their families,” the letter reads.

“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.”

Catholics are also called by the bishops to take part in the second round of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan’s public consultation on its new conscientious objection policy. The deadline for feedback is Aug. 7.

The college is currently working on a draft policy that deals with doctors refusing care based on ethical or religious grounds. The policy could force doctors to refer patients to another doctor for procedures such as euthanasia or abortion.

The letter is signed by Archbishop Daniel Bohan of Regina, Saskatoon Bishop Donald Bolen, Bishop Murray Chatlain of Keewatin-Le Pas, Prince Albert Bishop Albert Thévenot and Ukrainian Eparchial Bishop of Saskatoon Bryan Bayda.

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