



ONTARIO PROVINCIAL COUNCIL

LEGISLATION STANDING COMMITTEE

Inspired by the Spirit, Women Respond to God's Call

DIRECTIVE # 8

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March 2, 2017

To: Diocesan Legislation Standing Committee Chairpersons
From: Carol Richer, Ontario Provincial Council Legislation Standing Committee Chairperson
cc: Diocesan Presidents, Provincial Officers, Provincial Legislation Sub-committee member,
and National Legislation Standing Committee Chairperson

Let us renew each day our trust in the working of the Holy Spirit and open our hearts to his inspiration and gifts. (Pope Francis)

Today begins the beautiful season of Lent, a time for deepening our spiritual life through fasting, prayer and almsgiving.... all leading us to the joy of the Resurrection! This is my favourite liturgical season, and I look forward to all the opportunities it presents for reflection, renewal and reconciliation.

The purpose of this directive is two-fold. The first relates to Bill 84, An Act to amend various Acts with respect to medical assistance in dying.

The Call for Conscience Campaign ([Feb. 6 - March 31, 2017](#))

With physician-assisted suicide, (medical assistance in dying) now legal in Canada, healthcare practitioners and facilities in some provinces are in an extremely difficult position. Those who cannot support assisted suicide or euthanasia because of their conscience, faith or commitment to the Hippocratic Oath could be forced to compromise their conviction. This is unacceptable.

According to a recent article in the National Post, 24 Ontario doctors have asked to have their names permanently removed from a voluntary referral list of physicians willing to help people die, and another 30 have put their names on temporary hold. Ontario is one of the few provinces to track this information. The Canadian Medical Association vice-president of medical professionalism, Dr. Jeff Blackmer, has been quoted as stating that reports of doctors backing away from the act are not just anecdotal, but that the numbers are significant enough to be noted at a systemic level. He noted that some physicians who are participating do feel like they are alleviating pain and suffering. He further states "And then we are seeing doctors who go through one experience and it's just overwhelming, it's too difficult, and those are the ones who say 'take my name off the list. I can't do any more'."

Please refer to the Bulletin relating to **The Call for Conscience Campaign** on our provincial website. It contains important information about this issue, and includes a link to a sample letter which you are encouraged to use as is or as a guideline when you send your own letters to your local MP/MPP. Note the dates above ... time is quickly running out before this is dealt with in the legislature.

If you have not already done so, please contact your MPP within the next few days, by phone, email or letter, asking for their support in ensuring that conscience protection for healthcare workers is clearly defined and included in any amendment to Bill 84. Make sure your letter gets to your MP/MPP before March 31! Contact information for MPP's can be found at www.ontla.on.ca/members.

The second reason is related to the first... to give you an early reminder of the **upcoming May 4th, 2017 12 Hours of Prayer for Hospice and Palliative Care**, and to urge you to do your part to ensure the 2017 campaign receives even more attention and support than 2016.

I recently came across a few entries in a Respect Life Essay Contest, in which students addressed the issue of how assisted suicide devalues life. The wisdom these students brought to their essays was amazing. One grade 11 student raised these points: "When physician assisted suicide was legalized, it sent out a message that negatively affects our whole society. The message is that the elderly, disabled and sick people in our communities are burdens to us, and do not deserve to be given the most effective health care that could be provided to them...All human life must be valued, not only when it is convenient and rewarding, but also when there are times of suffering and death...physician assisted suicide distorts the patient/doctor relationship because when laws like this come into the picture, then the patient's best interest isn't the doctors first priority anymore." Another student wrote "Elderly people are a gift from God and they teach us a lot. We should bring love and joy to people in pain to make them happier...suffering is easier when it's offered up to Jesus". Although these comments were made by students in a California diocese, they reflect our own thoughts and concerns.

Contrast the thoughts of these students with what the proponents of assisted suicide offer the sick and suffering.

And so we must redouble our efforts to educate the public about palliative and hospice care as a compassionate, loving and dignified way of caring for people who are facing end-of-life situations. We must continue to lobby our government for fully funded, readily available palliative and hospice care for everyone who needs it.

This year, let's make our MP's/MPP's aware of the **12 Hours of Prayer for Hospice and Palliative Care**, not only by letting them know of our concerns, but by inviting them to join with us on May 4th, offering their own prayer that all Canadians will have access to quality end-of-life care.

I have attached a sample letter that can be sent (by email or post) to your local MP/MPP stating your concern, and inviting them to join us on May 4th. Information in this letter was taken from the "care kit" of information relating to the May 4th campaign, available from national office. You can find it at www.cwl.ca/12-hours-of-prayer-for-palliative-care. It's packed with so much good information on ways to participate in the 12 Hours of Prayer.

Information on contacting your MP can be found at www.parl.gc.ca/Parliamentarians.

By acting now, you will have time to share this information with your parish councils, allowing time for them to become involved in this initiative.

I thank you for your continued commitment to the work of this standing committee. May you be inspired by the Spirit to continue to respond to God's call.

Blessings,

Carol Richer

Legislation Standing Committee Chairperson
Ontario Provincial Council of
The Catholic Women's League of Canada
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