

Saskatchewan Interfaith Statement on Freedom of Conscience and Palliative Care

Presented to the Legislative Assembly of Saskatchewan on June 21, 2016

The legal and parliamentary proceedings over the past year on Physician Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia (also known as Physician Assisted Death) signal a critical moment in Canadian history. As Canadians, we all long to alleviate human suffering, even if we cannot agree about how best to achieve that good. Each person facing grave suffering and dying walks a unique and unrepeatable path that is ultimately their own; at the same time, family, friends, caregivers, and indeed the whole of society are impacted and evaluated by the care and love shared in our communities during life's most challenging times. To care for one another is a great privilege, and we reject attitudes, laws, and practices that present persons who are suffering, vulnerable, and dying as a burden.

We, the undersigned, though diverse in our beliefs and practices, commit to working towards these priorities wherever we can in our respective communities and urge our political leaders and community members to join in building a society of care and support for the suffering, vulnerable and dying among us:

- **We call for the protection of freedom of conscience for individuals and institutions.** Even in the midst of complex structures and systems, health care is always provided to people by people. Rooted in the principles of civic and religious freedom, individuals and institutions should never be coerced to participate in an activity they deem to be immoral or contrary to their professional codes of conduct or moral beliefs and personal integrity. Whereas many healthcare professionals serve to preserve and protect human life, Physician Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia asks caregivers to participate in causing the death of the patient. In the implementation of legislation, policy and/or regulations, we are calling for resources and processes that allow the safe, timely, compassionate and effective transfer of care of anyone asking for Physician Assisted Suicide or Euthanasia to a setting and healthcare provider where that can be discussed and fully discerned, ever respectful of the values of the person, healthcare provider, and healthcare institution. Upholding the duty to care, we affirm together that, in the provision of care for others, no healthcare professionals or institutions should be required to perform an act that violates the individual or collective conscience.
- **We call for an action plan on hospice palliative care being accessible and available to all residents of Saskatchewan.** Despite 96% of Canadians supporting hospice palliative care, only 16-30% of Canadians have access to and/or receive this care.¹ Strong and growing research indicates that access to palliative care improves patient and caregiver experiences as well as decreases pressures in acute and long-term healthcare settings. Hospice palliative care provides support and relief in suffering for patients living with and dying from advanced illnesses, as well as support for their families and communities of care. Much more needs to be done to enhance the quality of life for patients and their families, during chronic, advanced, and terminal illness both in the days and weeks preceding death, as well as over the longer periods of time that people live with advanced and/or chronic illness at home. We call on governments, community-based organizations and all members of the community to work together towards accessible and affordable hospice palliative care so that no one in our

¹ Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association Fact Sheet, March 2015. Available online: www.chpca.net/media/400075/fact_sheet_hpc_in_canada_march_2015_final.pdf

society will face suffering or death alone, in pain, and/or without access to quality care. We call for an action plan that outlines systemic change in the access to, availability of, and funding for hospice palliative care.

Access to Physician Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia in the absence of quality end of life care is not a real choice: the real option is quality hospice palliative care which will reduce the pressure to choose suicide that may be faced by the suffering, vulnerable, or dying among us. People deserve access to holistic care as they live through the process of their dying, and healthcare professionals and institutions deserve to be able to honour their consciences while caring for others.

Endorsements:

Ven. Olukayode (Kay) Adebogun, Rector, Anglican Church of the Redeemer, Regina and Archdeacon, Missionary Archdeaconry of Canada

Most Rev. Bryan Bayda, Bishop, Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Saskatoon

Rev. Dr. Jan Bigland-Pritchard, Incumbent, St. Stephen's Anglican Church, Saskatoon

Rev. Eldon Boldt, Lead Pastor, Circle Drive Alliance Church, Saskatoon

Most Rev. Donald Bolen, Bishop, Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatoon

Most Rev. Murray Chatlain, Archbishop, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Keewatin-Le Pas
Edward Cooper, Retired Hospital Chaplain, Saskatoon

Major Shawn Critch, Divisional Commander, The Salvation Army

Very Rev. Lorne D. Crozon, Diocesan Administrator, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Regina

Rev. Amanda Currie, Presbytery of Northern Saskatchewan, Presbyterian Church in Canada

John Drisner, Saskatchewan District Superintendent, Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada

Bruce Enns, Lead Pastor, Forest Grove Community Church, Saskatoon

Rev. Allen Fedorak, District Superintendent, Canadian Midwest District of the Christian and Missionary Alliance in Canada

Pastor Brendon Gibson, Emmanuel Baptist Church, Saskatoon

Rt. Rev. Rob Hardwick, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Qu'Appelle

Bishop Sid Haugen, Saskatchewan Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

Rt. Rev. Michael W. Hawkins, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Saskatchewan

Rev. Roy Hewko, Lead Pastor, Preston Avenue Community Church, Saskatoon

Rt. Rev. David Irving, Bishop, Anglican Diocese of Saskatoon

Rabbi Claudio Jodorkovsky, Congregation Agudas Israel, Saskatoon

Pastor Dale Kary, Hope Fellowship Mennonite Brethren Church, Saskatoon

Imam Mohammed Masloh, Islamic Association of Saskatchewan, Regina

Imam Khalid Minhas, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Saskatoon

President Yves Noblet, Regina Saskatchewan Stake, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Rabbi Jeremy Parnes, Regina

Shamoon Rashid, Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at Saskatoon

Major Gerald Reilly, Saskatoon Temple, The Salvation Army

President Douglas Robertson, Saskatoon Saskatchewan Stake, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Saskatoon Christian Centre

Saskatoon Church of Christ

Imam Ilyas Sidiyot and Imam Imran Desai on behalf of the Muslim community of Saskatoon

Pastor Harry Strauss, Forest Grove Community Church, Saskatoon

Gary Williams, Saskatchewan Representative, Wycliffe Bible Translators Canada

Rev:

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