



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

March 5, 2021

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

We are quickly approaching the one year mark of the pandemic. In retrospect, one cannot help but be inspired by the courageous efforts of so many to save lives. We especially see this in the area of healthcare. Right from the beginning we were told what we needed to do in order to save lives. We were constantly reminded that during a pandemic, our actions could help to save lives. We worked from a general assumption that people wanted to live, so we acted accordingly. All necessary precautions were taken to protect ourselves and others because we care.

I personally find it difficult to reconcile this focus on saving life with what is happening in Ottawa at this present moment. Our politicians are debating how we can make it easier for people to end their life. Bill C-7 – An Act to amend the Criminal Code ('Medical Assistance in Dying') is being debated with the intention of expanding the grounds for eligibility. Our government feels that more people should be allowed to decide for themselves when they wish to end their life.

Initially, our Government promoted MAiD as a way to provide relief from a painful death. Now it is going to provide death in order to escape a painful life. The amended bill would allow people with disabilities and chronic conditions to qualify even if they are not dying. This would also include those with mental health concerns and those who have an advanced directive. Do we really want to make it easier for people to choose death rather than life?

While we can empathize with people who are suffering, our Catholic tradition teaches us that our response to these individuals is to offer proper healthcare/palliative care, prayer, and accompaniment. It never involves actively taking a human life.

Health care professionals who have taken an oath to save life are now being compelled to be part of a process to actively end a life. In Ontario, physicians who are morally opposed to MAiD are being forced to participate through a referral. If they are unwilling to provide the procedure then they must refer the patient to someone who will provide this 'service'. The Ontario courts have agreed that this mandatory referral violates conscience rights under the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; however, the judges believe that it is justified in order to ensure that everyone has equal access to MAiD.

Ontario needs legislation to protect doctors, nurses, pharmacists and others. I invite you to visit www.canadiansforconscience.ca/ontario/ where you can send an email directly to the Ontario government and learn more about this critically important issue. If your MPP is Conservative your email will be sent to that person, and if you are represented by another party it will be sent to the Premier and the Health Minister. If you would like to view a video with testimonies from healthcare providers, please click here: bit.ly/2021ConscienceCampaign.

You may also wish to write to your Member of Parliament in Ottawa to express your concerns regarding the proposed legislation to expand access to assisted suicide across Canada.

Let us continue to pray for those who are sick, vulnerable and dying. May we be a nation that embraces life and the dignity of each person from the 'womb to the tomb'.

Yours sincerely in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerard Bergie". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Gerard Bergie, D.D.
Bishop of St. Catharines