



COMMUNICATIONS OFFICE

## **Health workers need conscience rights: Archbishop *Letter to politicians says those who don't want to kill need protection***

VANCOUVER (Feb. 17, 2016) – Any assisted-suicide law must allow health-care workers and institutions to refuse being unwilling accomplices in legalized killing, the Catholic Archbishop of Vancouver wrote in a letter sent to politicians throughout British Columbia.

Archbishop J. Michael Miller, in a letter to Premier Christy Clark, Members of B.C.'s Legislative Assembly, and Members of Parliament in the Lower Mainland, called for conscience protection for medical personnel and health-care institutions that ethically cannot participate in another person's suicide.

"The Catholic Church firmly opposes suicide, assisted suicide and euthanasia. No Catholic can, in good conscience, support, work towards or promote access to them. Human dignity is undermined when life can be taken at will," the Archbishop wrote. "Doctors, nurses, care aides and any other Canadians who believe that suicide is wrong must be free to continue to work in their chosen fields, free from any form of coercion or discrimination."

The same protections must apply to health-care facilities, he said. "The right of institutions to avoid participation in assisted suicide must be recognized and explicitly include their continued equitable participation in the health-care system."

The Archbishop said he was writing "to set forth the concerns of the Catholic community of the Archdiocese of Vancouver, which comprises 430,000 Catholics" as well as many non-Catholics, as federal and provincial governments prepare assisted-suicide legislation in response to the 2015 Supreme Court of Canada decision overturning Canada's assisted suicide law.

The Archbishop's letter also called for "equitable and generous access to palliative care" for all Canadians. "We are convinced by our faith, by our long-standing tradition of providing care for the sick and the needy, and by the witness of health care professionals who assist the dying that palliative care is the most practical and ethical way to ensure that all Canadians can die in a manner that respects human dignity."



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The letter to Premier Clark and B.C.'s MLAs also called for widespread consultation before government enacts any laws and regulations governing assisted suicide. The Archbishop expressed "great concern" that an initial consultation by a provincial sub-committee on assisted suicide last year heard only two presentations.

In a letter to be read at all Catholic churches in Vancouver, Archbishop Miller asked Catholics to sign postcards calling for conscience rights protection, as well as a petition calling for a national palliative care strategy. More information on the Archdiocese's efforts can be found at <http://rcav.org/assisted-suicide>

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