

RESPONSE TO THE SUPREME COURT DECISION ON ASSISTED SUICIDE

Assisted Suicide and the Culture of Death

By Fr. Pierre Champoux - St. Joseph's Workers for Life and Family Board Member
and Parish Priest for the Archdiocese of Ottawa

On February 6th, the Supreme Court of Canada, in a unanimous 9-0 decision, struck down the sections of the Criminal Code which prohibited assisted suicide, thereby reversing its 1993 ruling on the same issue. Parliament has 12 months to draft a new law before the ruling takes effect. The new law would have to allow for physician assisted suicide, as the ruling states:

"For a competent adult person who (1) clearly consents to the termination of life and (2) has a grievous and irremediable medical condition (including an illness, disease or disability) that causes enduring suffering that is intolerable to the individual in the circumstances of his or her condition."

The Court further noted that the suffering could be either physical or psychological pain and that the person's medical condition need not be terminal for them to be permitted to make a decision. This ruling will launch Canada into territory opened up by the Netherlands many years ago. As Wesley Smith noted in his 1997 book, *Forced Exit: the Slippery Slope from Assisted Suicide to Legalized Murder*:

"Dutch doctors have gone from being permitted to kill the terminally ill who ask for it, to killing the chronically ill who ask for it, to killing newborn babies in their cribs because they have birth defects, even though by definition they cannot ask for it. Dutch doctors also engage in involuntary euthanasia without significant legal consequence, even though such activity is officially prohibited."

As people of faith, how should we respond to this new situation? Deeply embedded in our moral and medical traditions is the distinction between allowing someone to die and murdering someone. The Church does not shun anyone for taking a pain reliever of some kind (such as morphine) for the main purpose of relieving one's pain. Medical treatment can also be refused if it is excessively burdensome. We can, and should, allow the dying to die; yet we don't have the right to intend the death of the living.

Once we have crossed the boundary between killing and allowing to die, it will be very difficult to limit the license to kill. Once the judgment is about the 'worth of human lives', then our hospitals, nursing homes, and other institutions will provide us with numerous candidates for elimination.

As Christians we do NOT have the right to decide who lives and who dies. We ARE called to relieve suffering whenever possible. Assisted suicide and euthanasia will inevitably tempt us to abandon those who are experiencing pain. This is especially the case when we allow ourselves to see people who are vulnerable and hurting as being a 'burden.'

Physician-assisted suicide degrades the worth of human life. It will advance the culture of death by allowing the legal termination of the lives of the most vulnerable amongst us. In addition, physician-assisted suicide will forever transform the role of physicians, confusing their function as preservers of life with that of takers of life. It will ultimately destroy the time-honoured role of doctors as healers who 'do no harm.'

The Power of Prayer

If Christians really understood the full extent of the power we have available through prayer, we might be speechless.

During WWII there was an adviser to Churchill who organized a group of people who dropped what they were doing every day at a prescribed hour for one minute to collectively pray for the safety of England, its people and for peace.

There is now a group of people organizing the same thing here in Canada. If you would like to participate -- every evening stop whatever you are doing at (9:00 pm Eastern Time) (8:00 pm Central) **(7:00 pm Mountain)** (6:00 pm Pacific),

and **spend one minute praying for peace and the safety of Canada and for a return to a Godly nation.**

If you know anyone else who would like to participate, please pass this along. Our prayers are the most powerful asset we have.