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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

I would like to bring to the attention of all parishioners the developing issues connected with the upcoming federal legislation associated with euthanasia/assisted suicide. On February 25th, 2016, a parliamentary committee presented 21 recommendations to the lawmakers who will craft the legislation regarding euthanasia/assisted suicide. Let me share with you just a few of the most disturbing of these recommendations and ask that you reflect upon them in light of our faith, and our Christian perspective of life. They include:

- A desire to allow, beginning in three years, access to euthanasia/assisted suicide for minors (those under 18)
- The ability for those diagnosed with conditions like dementia to pre-schedule euthanasia/assisted suicide.
- That those with psychiatric conditions be eligible for euthanasia/assisted suicide.
- A requirement that any institution receiving public funding, including catholic hospitals, long-term care facilities and hospices, provide euthanasia/assisted suicide, thus forcing them to repudiate the very principles that are the foundation of their immense service to us all.
- A requirement that doctors who conscientiously refuse to euthanize a patient must ensure that they refer the patient to another doctor who will provide this service. This seems to go against the landmark Carter case where the Supreme Court of Canada said that no physician could be forced to participate in assisted suicide.

I believe that we can all recognize that this is a highly complex and intensely emotional issue which will profoundly affect all of us. While death comes to us all, it comes in various ways. Although patients benefit from medication that controls pain, they are fully justified in refusing burdensome and disproportionate treatment that serves only to prolong the inevitable process of dying. But let us remember that dying is simply not the same as being killed. We are all grateful for physicians and nurses and others in the health care continuum who offer medical assistance to patients who are dying; however, it cannot be justified for them to euthanize a patient.

We need to recognize that palliative care (end of life care) is critically important for dying patients, their families and loved ones. Our palliative care professionals and volunteers bring light, hope, and comfort into very difficult life situations both at home and within health care facilities. However, it

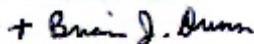
is important for us to recognize that this service is presently only accessible to 30% of Canadians. This is a tragic fact that should be unacceptable in our country. Instead of providing ways to hasten death, we need to provide palliative care for every Canadian. We need greater support and awareness of mental health issues and at the same time we need to bring greater care for those tempted to commit suicide. As pastoral ministers and caring pastoral communities we need to find ways to be more present to the dying and to the families of the dying, as we renew our efforts to minister to the vulnerable at all stages of life.

It is true that some people become convinced that, at a certain point, there is no longer any “value” in their life, since they cannot function as they once did. Their concern deserves our compassionate respect, for it is our belief that our value arises from our inherent dignity as human beings and not on how well we function.

As the federal government prepares legislation to implement the Supreme Court’s decision, it is crucial to consider the effects of this fundamental change in our laws. I ask that you continue to be informed about this issue and I encourage pastors and parish pastoral councils to consider becoming more informed on this topic and finding ways to engage all of our parishioners on this issue. To assist in this effort, you will find excellent articles on our diocesan web site (www.antigonishdiocese.com). Please call or write your Member of Parliament to voice your opinion on what should or should not be included in the new legislation. Once the law is adopted it will be extremely difficult to change since it would require a Constitutional challenge.

Now is the time to speak up about this serious and life changing new law, for these issues will affect us and we need to be involved. It is time for all of us to have a difficult but necessary conversation about the need for quality end of life that is reflective of our values and beliefs. Let us all understand the implications of these legal changes and may we offer truly loving and merciful alternatives. May we join together and pray fervently for all Members of Parliament in their reflection on this life and death issue.

Sincerely in Christ,



† Brian Joseph Dunn
Bishop of Antigonish

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