



Anglican Network in Canada

Office of the Diocesan Bishop
The Right Reverend Charlie Masters
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20 March 2015

The Honourable Peter MacKay
Minister of Justice
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Re. Supreme Court of Canada decision removing legal prohibitions on euthanasia and assisted suicide (6 February 2015)

Dear Minister MacKay:

I am writing to express our deep concern regarding the implications of the Supreme Court of Canada decision in *Carter v Canada*.

Historically, the prohibition against assisted suicide and euthanasia reflected the value Canadians placed on all human life and served to protect the vulnerable.

Our laws shape and reinforce our societal values. Allowing assisted suicide and euthanasia, over time, will undermine Canadians' foundational commitment to the sanctity of human life, a commitment that has historically undergirded our laws and our social policy.

Canada could falter in its concern for protecting the vulnerable. Rather than recognizing the intrinsic value of each human life, our lives will increasingly be valued based on utility. Even in the absence of overt pressure, those who feel they are a burden on society or on their families may feel obliged to prematurely end their lives.

This represents a seismic shift in foundational and long-established Canadian values and public policy.

Given what is at stake – the complexity, the ramifications, and the potential for serious unintended consequences – this matter calls for careful consideration by thoughtful people. It is regrettable that the Court's timing of this decision ensures the issue will become politicized. With the upcoming federal election, the timeframe prescribed by the court is dangerously short and almost seems designed to ensure a poor legislative outcome.

To allow appropriate time for thorough consideration, we urge the government to invoke Section 33 of the Charter – the so-called “notwithstanding clause”. This would allow five full years to give the matter the attention it deserves.

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Failing that, we urge you to draft a very narrow statutory exemption to the prohibition on assisted suicide which provides all the protection possible to the vulnerable. We also ask that judicial review be required to ensure the criteria and safeguards put in place are met.

We also ask that any legislation protect physicians and health care workers so that no one can be coerced to act – directly or indirectly – counter to his or her conscience or religious beliefs. Many believe assisted suicide and euthanasia are not medical care - which should always be designed to support and enhance life – and that these are, in fact, violations of the Hippocratic Oath.

Please be assured of our prayers for Canada, for Canada's legal system, for all who serve us in government – both elected and non-elected – and specifically for those who are wrestling with the government's response to the Supreme Court decision. May God grant you much wisdom!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Masters". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

The Right Reverend Charlie Masters