

PHYSICIAN ASSISTED SUICIDE

(Church Doctrine, Interim Report, p. 33–34)

The Committee on Church Doctrine encourages congregation, presbyteries and agencies to discuss the possible change to the title, “Physician Assisted Suicide” with “Physician Assisted Suicide: Medical Assistance in Dying” and report comments to the Committee on Church Doctrine through the General Assembly Office by January 31, 2021 .

When the General Assembly received the report on Physician Assisted Suicide, the committee mentioned that it will study the feedback from the wider church, make adjustments as necessary and report to the Assembly. The committee’s discussions about physician assisted suicide included concerns about the way the practice has shifted after the door was first opened in other jurisdictions. The practice is typically first accepted with very strict guidelines that are then softened as court cases and various action groups bring pressure to bear. This has already begun to happen in Canada. In the months since our report was first drafted, two individuals from Quebec brought a successful legal challenge against the requirement that death needed to be imminent for physician assisted suicide to be granted. There is little doubt that just as in other jurisdiction, the guidelines will continue to shift here in Canada. The committee felt it would be difficult to rewrite and adjust their report after each development as it comes. We therefore entrust our initial report to the church, such as it is, with confidence in our commitment to the sanctity of life, our ability to hold it in tandem with the need for passionate pastoral care in situations that seem to have no obvious response and our considered reflections on further developments as our society increasingly approves of a practice that is of concern to many.

Also, in our discussion it became very clear that for this document to be used widely we had to address the issue of acceptance. The committee did not desire to change the title of the report. However, the committee felt that it was important to add a subtitle in ways that the wider Canadian Public may have no hesitation in making use of the report. The discussion centred on the stigma surrounding the word, suicide and how it may deter many from taking a look at otherwise a very useful Christian viewpoint. The committee suggests that the new title be “Physician Assisted Suicide: Medical Assistance in Dying”.