NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

# Quebec at a crossroads with euthanasia bill, province's bishops say

Deborah Gyapong Catholic News Service | Jun. 18, 2013
Ottawa, Ontario

As the Quebec government considers an end-of-life bill that would allow euthanasia, Quebec's Catholic bishops warn that society faces a crucial choice.

"We are at a crossroads with this choice," said Archbishop Pierre-Andre Fournier of Rimouski, president of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Quebec. "This is a very important moment for the future of our country, of our society."

At stake is the future of civilized society that has been based on the fundamental right to life and around the protection of human life, the archbishop said of the legislation, known as Bill 52.

"You don't kill," he said.

Though the bishops' assembly issued a statement welcoming the bill's palliative care provisions, Fournier warned that Bill 52 uses language as a "trap" that could confuse people. Euthanasia, the deliberate killing of another human being, is disguised under the words "medical aid in dying," he said.

Quebec's bishops raised concerns that intentionally causing death is "considered a treatment and claimed as a right" in the legislation, the statement said.

In allowing euthanasia, the bill also affects religious freedom and conscience rights, according to the archbishop. Health care providers opposed to participating in the deliberate killing of another person would have no recourse because the Quebec government owns most of the hospitals in the province, he said.

Palliative care centers also will have to provide the opportunity for medical aid in dying, he said.

But even if there were a way to make sure it did not happen in Catholic settings, Fournier said, "we are against it anywhere."

"We have to think about the doctors and the nurses who will be asked to perform this act," Fournier said. "In the project of law they don't say how it will be done."

Bill 52 has drawn opposition from doctors as well.

The Catholic Civil Rights League also has raised concerns about the impact of euthanasia on vulnerable Quebeckers and the bill's likelihood of restricting conscience rights.

"While this proposed legislation allows doctors to refuse to participate in euthanasia requests, it implies that they must participate in a process referring the request to a more willing provider," the league said. "There appears to be no provision for the religious and conscientious rights of other members of the health care team."

"As we have seen on the question of abortion, legalization can lead to pressure on health care workers to participate in activities they find morally objectionable," the league said.

Joanne McGarry, league executive director, said Bill 52 goes further than other similar legislation because it would requires every institution to make referrals without reference to the religious foundations of that institution.

"We need to remember this sort of thing is a very serious matter," she said. "It's one of the most serious decisions a doctor could make."

She also warned that allowing euthanasia inside a palliative care setting will make people think palliative care is going to kill them. "In many respects it's like that in the Netherlands already," she said.

"We're very much opposed to this bill," McGarry added. "We'll be watching its progress with great concern and will be trying to educate people on how far-reaching the implications could be."

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