



# THE BETHANIA GROUP

"Bethania, a Mennonite Organization, provides a compassionate, outstanding long term care and affordable housing for seniors."

## The Bethania Group Board of Directors

### *Declaration on Physician Assisted Death (Medical Assistance in Dying)*

April 21, 2016

#### OUR BELIEFS AND VALUES

The beliefs and values that guide our mission and vision as a Mennonite organization are rooted in the Christian scriptures as the authoritative written Word of God for us. Central to our position on Physician Assisted Death is our traditional Mennonite distinctive pacifist stance of conscientious objection to the taking of human life. We cannot, in good conscience, condone or be involved in any way in the intentional taking of human life, including Physician Assisted Death.

As a Mennonite Christian organization, the Bethania Group draws its beliefs and commitment to compassionate care, from the guiding principles outlined in the Confession of Faith in a Mennonite Perspective.

- We believe that all creation ultimately has its source outside itself and belongs to the Creator. Life and death is in God's hands.
- We believe our understanding of Christian discipleship invites us to surrender willingly to the will of God in our lives.
- We believe that peace and justice are the will of God, and reflected in ministries of healing, alleviating suffering and supporting the disadvantaged and vulnerable in society.
- We believe we have a common commitment to understanding all life as a sacred gift from God.
- We believe that natural death is a normal part of life and acts as a doorway to eternal life.
- We believe that we are created in the image of God.
- We believe that we are called to honor the dignity and worth of each life until natural death occurs.

Further, we live and operate as the faithful stewards of all that God has entrusted to us. Where the demands of government, therefore, may conflict with the demands of Christ and our faith, we choose to obey God above any human authority.

These beliefs are further reflected in our organizational values as they relate to the Residents of our Personal Care Homes. These values guide our actions and decision-making and include *respect for individual rights, dignity and support of residents' self-worth, integrity of staff and hope.*

## **BACKGROUND**

Physician Assisted Death refers to a medical intervention that involves a **physician providing or administering medication that intentionally causes a patient's death.**

In February 2015, the Supreme Court of Canada judgement in Carter v. Canada, struck down the prohibition in the Criminal Code of Canada, against Physician Assisted Death (also known as Physician Assisted Suicide or Medical Aid in Dying). Further, the Court directed the Federal and Provincial governments to enact legislation consistent with their ruling and gave a deadline of February, 2016 for such legislation to be in place. On January 15, 2016, the Supreme Court agreed to a four-month extension to June 6, 2016.

In response to the Supreme Court decision, the Federal Government assembled a three person panel to consult broadly with stakeholders and report on their findings. The province of Manitoba in turn, has created an interdepartmental working group to provide guidance and advice concerning the legal, regulatory and practical aspects to implement the Courts direction. In addition, in July 2015 the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority sent an internal communiqué to Medical Doctors, senior staff and CEOs of health facilities, stating it will respect the decision of faith based organizations not to participate in Physician Assisted Death. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba have also undertaken stakeholder consultations in order to develop a policy position to direct the roles and responsibilities of Manitoba's physicians in this area.

Since February, 2015, a number of Churches and faith based organizations expressed opinions against the legalization of Physician Assisted Death and their absolute opposition to its implementation. Many Christian not for profit health care groups, also joined in the protest and made statements avowing never to allow the practice of Physician Assisted Death by their medical staff or on their premises, nor to refer patients or personal care home residents to physicians who will perform or facilitate a Physician Assisted Death. For example, the Catholic Health Association of Manitoba publically rejected support for or participation in, Physician Assisted Death and wrote the Prime Minister requesting more time be allowed for discussion, before legislation is tabled. While Mennonite Church Canada did not take a position, they pointed to the Confession of Faith for guidance by Mennonite Churches and health care organizations, as noted above.

On April 14, 2016, the Federal Government introduced draft legislation to legalize medical assisted death, for debate and approval by the House of Commons and the Senate before the June 6 deadline. Irrespective of the impending Federal and any subsequent related Provincial legislation, the Bethania Group has established its position on Physician Assisted Death (also known as Medical Assistance in Dying-MAID) as follows.

## **BETHANIA GROUP DECLARATION ON PHYSICIAN ASSISTED DEATH**

The Bethania Group forbids a Physician Assisted Death to be performed by our Medical Staff, Nursing Staff, any other Bethania Group staff, or by any other external Physician or agent, in or at the Bethania Mennonite Personal Care Home, the Pembina Place Mennonite Personal Care Home, the BethaniaHaus seniors residence,

or any other Personal Care Home or Seniors' Housing Facility that the Bethania Group may own and operate in the future.

Further, our Medical Staff, Nursing Staff, Allied Health Staff, Chaplains and any other Bethania Group employee are prohibited from referring Residents, families or tenants to Physicians or other agents for the expressed purpose of performing a Physician Assisted Death, or counselling those Residents, families or tenants to seek Physicians or other agents, for the expressed purpose of performing a Physician Assisted Death.

## **OUR COMMITMENT TO RESIDENTS**

- In the interest of self-disclosure, the Bethania Group will declare its institutional position on Physician Assisted Death, as indicated above, including the prohibition on its provision to all residents and potential new residents. This commitment is to ensure that residents have clarity on what is permitted within the facility, and can therefore make informed decisions with respect to whether to enter or remain in the facility. The Bethania Group is also committed to appropriately inform residents and potential new residents of the implications of the institutional conscientious objection to Physician Assisted Death. Any ongoing treatment will be provided in a non-discriminatory manner.
- As a conscientiously objecting Health Care Facility, the Bethania Group recognizes the legal requirement to refer residents to sources for more information on Physician Assisted Death, if so requested. The Bethania Group is committed to respect the autonomy of residents who may wish to seek Physician Assisted Death at a later date, with the understanding that the Bethania group will not participate in the process or provide referrals or transport for that purpose.
- The Bethania Group is committed to our duty to care for and not abandon the residents within our facilities.
- Residents in the Bethania Group Personal Care Homes who wish to seek Physician Assisted Death will not be impeded from seeking referrals outside of the facilities, keeping in mind that our Medical Staff is prohibited from performing Physician Assisted Death or referring Residents for the express purpose of seeking Physician Assisted Death.
- In situations when a resident pursues Physician Assisted Death with a non-objecting institution or location, the Bethania Group shall make arrangements for an effective transfer of all relevant records, to the non-objecting institution or location.
- The Bethania Group is committed to provide compassionate care to all residents based on the standards of best practices in Long Term Health Care throughout the resident's stay and at the end of life. These practices include the ethical administration of pain medication for comfort, compassionate care, and spiritual and emotional support of residents and family members.
- The Bethania Group is committed to implementing best practices in Palliative Care and to incorporate them into the educational programs for all staff.
- The Bethania Group is committed to provide Spiritual Care, emotional support and other counselling for residents who express a wish to die and may be requesting Physician Assisted Death.

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Henry Neudorf  
Chair, The Bethania Group Board  
April 21, 2016