



MOST REV. HÉCTOR VILA
BISHOP OF WHITEHORSE
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ATTN: Victor Istchenko
CBC YUKON
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October 3, 2016

Dear Mr. Istchenko,

I am currently out-of-territory but have included a brief response to the questions you have forwarded to me.

I will be posting this full response to our website. Please point your listeners or readers to our diocesan page at www.whitehorsediocese.ca for the full response and further resources on this issue in days to come.

“Although I am not a signatory to the guidelines issued by the Alberta and NWT Bishops on the Celebration of the Catholic Sacraments with persons or families considering or opting for euthanasia or assisted dying, I am sure it is in keeping with church teaching. However, it is a full document, and real exploration of its contents requires a patient and thoughtful discussion among those interested.

The Catholic Church has one position on assisted death, which has been made clear by bishops across Canada. The request for euthanasia or assisted suicide “is contrary to the most profound natural inclination of each human being to live and preserve life.” (Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, April 14, 2016). The Canadian Conference of Bishops has spoken at great length on this subject. That said, I, along with all priests in our diocese, are called to bring comfort and support to those who are dying, to their loved ones, so that no one feels they must end their own life.

The most important response for us is that we do not abandon those who are suffering. We must be present to pray, dialogue and journey with those in their final days. We must balance this pastoral care with our teaching of the sacredness of every life. In this way, a catholic funeral may not be appropriate, as a person’s decision to move forward with assisted suicide differs greatly from the Catholic teaching on the sanctity of each life. Above all, priests from this diocese will always be available to accompany people through the most difficult circumstances of suffering and mourning. This includes discerning, in conversation with the family, the most appropriate funeral or memorial service for someone who has passed away by means of assisted-death.

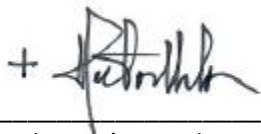
As a new bishop to the Yukon, recently installed in February 2016, I am familiarizing myself and our priests – some of who are newly arrived – with our northern community. At this time, I have not issued written guidelines for our priests but I am always counselling and guiding our priests in their role as pastoral care givers.

Any instruction or guidance I give is always situated in the role of the Catholic Church as an advocate for life and the dignity of the person. The great calling of our pastoral work is to communicate these truths about the sanctity of life at the community level and with individuals. At times this can be easy, and other times more complicated, but always it is a mission of love.

The value of life and the important place of each person's relationship with Christ is something that is spoken to, in some way, at every Mass. Everyone – parishioners, as well as those who are searching, and those who need hope – have a chance to hear this message at Mass, and, we pray, from other Christian believers around them.

We have a strong Catholic community here and there are many ways that Catholic teachings on suffering, hope, and on compassionate spiritual and physical care for others are communicated and lived. Let us journey together in compassion and mercy, with a ministry of presence to those who are suffering, now and always.”

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, starting with a plus sign followed by a stylized name.

+Bishop Héctor Vila