

Assisted dying: What the religious leaders say

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Catholic Archbishop of Toronto Thomas Collins says: "When you cause someone's death to happen . . . that is not 'dying', and I find that really troubling. ... There's a profound difference between 'dying' and 'killing'." MICHAEL PEAKE - TORONTO SUN

Religious views loom large behind the debate over assisted dying. Catholic, Islamic, Jewish and Evangelical Christian beliefs are in resounding favour of the preservation of life in the face of grave illness. Postmedia spoke to religious leaders who joined together to lobby the government against euthanasia to the Special Joint Committee on Physician-

Assisted Dying leading up to Thursday's announced legislation.

The archbishop

The Catholic Church takes the stance that better palliative care and pain relief for the gravely ill is the preferable approach for the terminally ill.

"When you cause someone's death to happen," said Toronto Archbishop Cardinal Thomas Christopher Collins, "That is not 'dying', and I find that really troubling. ... There's a profound difference between 'dying' and 'killing'."

Cardinal Collins says he is concerned that the laws will become less strict over time, as he's seen in European countries.

The imam

The Islamic faith views euthanasia as wrong. It teaches that all human life is sacred.

Imam Sikander Ziad Hashmi of the Kanata Muslim Association said there is more the government could be doing through palliative care.

"It is, perhaps, good to see that the justice minister has taken into consideration at least some of the concerns that were expressed," said Hashmi. "But at the same time, it's not something that we're in agreement with, in principle."

The rabbi

Jewish law says that human life is sacred, and that it is wrong to shorten a person's life.

Well-known Ottawa rabbi, Reuven Bulka, has said in the past his opposition to physician-assisted dying is not intended to impose his religion's values upon fellow Canadians, but to focus on protecting the sanctity of life and "our natural instincts to save people when they need to be saved."

"What we would be doing — as we've advocated all along — is to help people through this crisis," Bulka said during an October 2015 news conference. "(An ill person's) difficulty is, they can't see a tomorrow. If we open up a window to a tomorrow, obviously we would want them to have it."

The Evangelical director

The Evangelical Fellowship of Canada represents Baptist, Mennonite, Pentecostal and Christian and Missionary Alliance churches. Based on their interpretation of

the Bible, the fellowship is opposed to any intentional taking of a life, and has argued for “the strongest possible protections for vulnerable Canadians.”

“(The amendment to) Bill C-14 is for sure, much more narrow in scope than, for example, what the special joint committee recommended,” said Julie Beazley, director of public policy for the fellowship.

“But even with a narrower scope, there are inherent risks in allowing these practices at all.”

Beazley welcomed the announcement of “a significant financial investment in home care and palliative care.”