

# origins

CNS documentary service

## Guidelines for Celebration of Sacraments for People Who Consider or Opt for Assisted Suicide

Bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories

The bishops of Alberta and the Northwest Territories in Canada have issued pastoral guidelines for clergy dealing with Catholics who are considering euthanasia or assisted suicide, which are now legal in Canada. The document, written for priests and parishes, gives guidance on when people in such situations are eligible to receive certain sacraments or a Catholic funeral. The document

*“How are we to respond with a pastoral care that at once expresses the church’s deep concern for the salvation of souls and safeguards the dignity of the sacraments?”*

specifically addresses the sacraments of reconciliation and anointing of the sick. “In our day a priest may encounter a penitent who has officially requested physician-assisted suicide or euthanasia,” the document says. “The penitent has not yet been killed nor has he/she committed suicide, but he or she has initiated the process, which is already a grave matter.” The bishops said, “If the penitent does not rescind this request, he or she will be killed. They are in this objective state of sin, which is gravely disordered.” The bishops noted that not all Catholics realize assisted suicide is a grave sin and that once a person is made aware of this and is “open to reconsidering the decision, the priest can absolve. There is at least the beginning of contrition, a willingness to reconsider and thus possibly rectify their situation.” The bishops said that “in the case of a person who is contemplating a request for medical assistance in committing suicide or for euthanasia but has not yet determined to do so, the grace of the sacrament of anointing is not to be denied,” but the church’s teaching should be clearly articulated. The guidelines follow.

### INTRODUCTION

Death by assisted suicide and euthanasia has been made legal in Canada. These grievous affronts to the dignity of human life from beginning to natural end are never morally justified. The legal permission now granted to these practices does not change

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