



Final Report of the Task Force on Decisions at the End of Life

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----------|
| Mandate | page 2 |
| Appointments..... | page 3 |
| Process | page 3 |
| Recommendations | page 4 |
| Conclusion..... | page 6 |
| Appendix One: | attached |
| Proposed Resolution on Decisions at the End of Life: | |
| <i>The Call to Faithfully Journey with those who are Dying: An ELCIC Resolution.</i> | |
| Appendix Two: | attached |
| Sample <i>Dwelling in the Word</i> document | |

Mandate

The 2015 National Convention passed the following motion asking that NCC review the ELCIC's current policy on assisted death:

NC-2015-08: That in light of advances in medical science and the recent Supreme Court of Canada's ruling decriminalizing doctor assisted death the National Church Council be directed to review our current Resolution on Decisions-At-The-End-Of-Life approved at the Sixth Biennial Convention of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada (1997).

CARRIED

Following up on the convention action, NCC passed the following motion creating a Task Force:

CC-2015-51 That NCC establish a Task Force to encourage conversations across our church regarding the needs of people in times of death and dying, and to review our current Resolution on Decisions-At-The-End-Of-Life (1997).

The Task Force will prepare a study guide, and submit it to NCC by March 2017, that lifts up emerging realities, with consideration being given to:

- Vocabulary and definitions*
- Legislation*
- Core theological values*
- Faith questions.*

A final report will be submitted to NCC by September 2018 including recommended updates to the current resolution.

NCC asks the officers to appoint 3 to 5 persons, who collectively have the following:

- Palliative care expertise*
- Medical ethics*
- Theological expertise*
- Member of NCC*
- Member of the Anglican Church of Canada.*

CARRIED

Appointments

The Officers appointed the following person to the Task Force on Decisions at the End of Life: Rev. Dr. Dwight Biggs, Rev. Lynn Granke, Rev. Canon Douglas Graydon (Anglican appointment), Ms. Jeanie Stann, and Dr. Janet Storch. Staff support was provided by Rev. Paul Gehrs, Assistant to the Bishop for Justice and Leadership.

Both Janet Storch (ELCIC appointment) and Douglas Graydon served on the Anglican Church of Canada Task Force on Physician Assisted Dying from 2015–2016. The ELCIC Task Force benefited from the experience gained as our Full Communion Partner worked on this issue.

Process

The Task Force met three times face to face and several times via conference call. In March, 2017, the Task Force submitted *ELCIC Study Guide for Conversations on Medical Assistance in Dying* to NCC, who subsequently acknowledged receipt of the Study Guide and commended it to members and congregations of the ELCIC for engaging in conversations on needs of people in times of death and dying (NC-2017-12).

From March 2017 to April 2018, members of the ELCIC were invited to offer input. Thirty responses were received from across the church. Along with some individual responses, the majority of the input came from groups who had engaged in conversation using the Study Guide. This input was extremely valuable in developing policy-statement recommendations for NCC.

In June, 2016, the Task Force invited theologians, ELCIC members with doctorates in theology, to offer input to questions of decisions at the end of life. Fifteen papers were received. This input was extremely valuable in the development of the Study Guide. The Task Force found some of the papers particularly helpful.

In May, 2018, the Task Force met to prepare this report, including a revised statement for NCC to consider and possibly recommend to the 2019 national convention. The Task Force began and ended each day by Dwelling in the Word: that is, by hearing a piece of scripture and listening for *what the Spirit is saying to us today*. The Task Force found this practice helpful as we wrestled with the complexities, challenges and emotional gravitas of the task.

As the Task Force met to discern recommendations for updates to the current resolution, we became aware that we were trying to write “policy” that was, in many ways, intended to be lived out in very intimate spiritual care settings. At this point, we began to imagine “what might we say if a friend asked for an opinion and guidance about end of life decisions, without offering all the details of why they were asking?” Perhaps the best the church can offer as a public statement is some wisdom and perspective, even as members of the ELCIC could be called upon at any time to journey with the family or friends who are dying. The most difficult questions and responses will be lived out in the midst of specific contexts and with particular persons. It is our sense that new issues around medical assistance in dying are continuing to emerge, and, therefore, complex ethical discussion will continue in the public square.

Throughout the process, we remained conscious of the potential for members of the church to be present to offer spiritual care in times of illness and death, and to be encouragers of conversation and reflection on the meaning of living, dying and death. It is our hope that the process of considering decisions at the end of life might empower disciples to be present in meaningful ways with those in need and among those with questions.

Recommendations

1. New Resolution on Decisions at the End of Life

We recommend that NCC asks the National Convention to consider a new ELCIC Resolution on decisions at the end of life, attached below as Appendix 1.

That NCC approves and recommends for adoption to the 2019 National Convention
The Call to Faithfully Journey with those who are Dying: An ELCIC Resolution.

2. Implementing Motions

We recommend that NCC asks the National Convention to consider three implementation motions, if the new Resolution is adopted by the convention.

Implementing Motion A: Resources on Spiritual Care

That NCC approves and recommends for adoption to the 2019 National Convention the following motion:

That the ELCIC National Convention asks the National Church Council to identify, gather and share resources that will support congregations and faith communities in living out the calling to offer spiritual care throughout the sacred journey of life, including birth, dying and death. This will include resources on providing safe space for conversations about dying and death, and resources for worship and prayer. We encourage congregations and faith communities to identify and gather local resources.

Implementing Motion B: Support for Access to Palliative Care

That NCC approves and recommends for adoption to the 2019 National Convention the following motion:

That the ELCIC National Convention asks the National Bishop to write to the Prime Minister and to all provincial / territorial premiers expressing the ELCIC's support for just and universal access for all to dignified, quality palliative care and encouraging these elected leaders address inequities of access in the health care system. The Convention asks the National Bishop to invite synodical bishops to jointly sign the letters to premiers in their respective territories.

Implementing Motion C: Support for Access to Mental Health Care Services

That NCC approves and recommends for adoption to the 2019 National Convention the following motion:

That the ELCIC National Convention asks the National Bishop to write to the Prime Minister and to all provincial / territorial premiers expressing support for just and universal access for all to dignified, quality mental health care services and encouraging these elected leaders address inequities of access in the health care system. The Convention asks the National Bishop to invite synodical bishops to jointly sign the letters to premiers in their respective territories.

3. Dwelling in the Word

We recommend that NCC invite the church to practice Dwelling in the Word while reviewing the proposed resolution and in preparation for convention. A sample *Dwelling in the Word* format is provided in Appendix 2.

4. Theological Resources

We recommend that the following theological papers, submitted to the Task Force, be posted on the ELCIC website as resources to the church:

Rev. Dr. Kayko Driedger Hesslein,
Rev. Dr. Alan Grundahl (Bishop, retired),
Rev. Dr. Peter Kuhnert,
Rev. Dr. Telmor Sartison (Bishop, Retired);
Rev. Dr. David Pfrimmer

We also recommend that *In Sure and Certain Hope* and *The Study Guide to In Sure and Certain Hope*, produced by the Anglican Church of Canada's Task Force on Physician Assisted Dying (www.anglican.ca/faith/focus/ethics/pad/), be posted on the ELCIC website.

5. Task Force Presence at Convention.

We recommend that the Task Force be invited to convention to present, and answer questions, regarding the Proposed Resolution. (If NCC decides to recommend the resolution it is to be considered by convention).

6. Task Force Final Report

We recommend that this report be posted on the ELCIC website along with other relevant information about decisions at the end of life.

Conclusion

As identified in the Proposed Resolution, *whenever we enter into a context where death is near, we are standing on Holy Ground*. As a Task Force we are aware of the importance and the difficulties of these matters. And we remain hopeful that the church will grow in its capacity to be present for conversation, care and ministry.

We are grateful for opportunity to serve on this Task Force. The work we've done together with the feedback of the community and the wisdom of theologians along with all of our own experiences and wisdom has challenged and expanded our own perspectives and has been a very meaningful and faith-rich experience. We find the theme of the next national convention, *Called to Journey Together: The Ministry of Reconciliation*, to be a meaningful framework in which to take next steps in reflecting on decisions at the end of life.

Our prayers are with NCC as you review this report and we look forward to hearing the results of your deliberations. We are open to responding to any additional needs as might be identified by National Church Council.

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I fear no evil; for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—they comfort me.*

Psalm 23

Respectfully submitted:

Dwight Biggs

Lynn Granke

Douglas Graydon

Jeanie Stann

Janet Storch

Paul Gehrs (ELCIC Staff)