



International Interfaith Symposium on Palliative Care

Toronto, 23 May 2024 - The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCC) and the Pontifical Academy for Life (PAV), in collaboration with other key partners, organized an international interfaith symposium on palliative care titled "**Towards a Narrative of Hope**," which took place in Toronto from 21-23 May 2024.

The Symposium affirmed that hope, its central theme, is always possible, even in life's most challenging moments. Presentations explored educating and promoting a culture of social responsibility within palliative care. Experts in ethics, medicine, healthcare, law, and pastoral care discussed strategies to relieve suffering during illness and dying, as well as ways to provide appropriate human accompaniment to improve the quality of life and well-being of patients and their families.

In a written message, His Holiness Pope Francis warmly encouraged the participants to persevere in their commitment to promoting palliative care, which is an expression of compassion and respect for the infinite dignity of every person.

An interfaith panel featuring different religious and cultural perspectives highlighted the importance of faith and culture in supporting the needs of the sick and dying and alleviating their physical, spiritual, and emotional suffering.

The Symposium Chair, Bishop Noël Simard, noted that the initiative allowed for the exchange of ideas in a spirit of collaboration and mutual respect among national and international experts. "It is urgent that we work together to promote palliative care which is threatened by some practices," he stated. "Palliative care is the answer, offering to the suffering and dying person an accompaniment based on love, compassion and respect for the dignity of the human person until natural death." He added: "This Symposium demonstrates our collective and ongoing determination to advocate for improved access to palliative care in Canada and around the world."

Archbishop Vincenzo Paglia, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, noted, “even when healing is no longer possible, it is always possible to care for others. Palliative care is a deeply human vision of medicine. In the final stages of earthly existence, we must counter indifference and the culture of waste. Palliative care is a special form of charity and should be encouraged.”

Msgr. Renzo Pegoraro, Chancellor of the Pontifical Academy for Life, affirmed that “in addition to clinical experience, palliative care requires the contribution of the humanities and the indispensable word of truth and meaning brought by religion regarding the search for the meaning of life and the mystery of self-discovery, including how to prepare for the encounter with God for those who are believers.”

A working group is now tasked with collating the participants’ key recommendations, focusing on five areas: advocacy for palliative care, community engagement and support, education, integrating the cultural dimension into palliative care, and palliative care policy and legislation. CCCB President Bishop William T. McGrattan affirmed this follow-up work, saying: “Each of us, as a member of society, has a duty to assist and love the sick and dying and to support their loved ones with compassion so that no one is isolated, alone, or forgotten in their time of need. This Symposium signifies a strong commitment to life and holistic care, which will bear much fruit.”

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Media Requests:

Maribel Mayorga
Director of Communications
Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCB)
Email: communications@ccb.ca
Telephone: 613-241-9461, ext. 225

Fabrizio Mastrofini
Director of Communications
Pontifical Academy for Life
Email: pressoffice@pav.va
Telephone: +39 06 698 95 216