



CANADIAN CONSEIL
UNITARIAN UNITARIEN
COUNCIL DU CANADA

Resolutions – 1973 – 1993 – Choice in Dying, A Summary

The Canadian Unitarian Council has adopted three resolutions related to the right to die. In 1973, the focus was on withdrawal of treatment in terminal illness subject to reasonable safeguards. In 1976, the resolution “urges the Law Reform Commission of Canada to propose a modification to the criminal code, subject to proper safeguards and sanctions, expedient to the situation when the withdrawal of life support treatment would be considered an act of compassion.” In the supportive material, examples of “acts of compassion” included withdrawing treatment in cases of terminal illness, not resorting to heroic measures to prolong life, and assisting a patient to commit suicide with compassion rather than malice as motive.

In 1992-3, the CUC provided study materials to its congregations on issues related to death and dying. A majority of congregations participated, and a significant number of individuals from these congregations sent in responses to a questionnaire which included both directed and free-response questions. A very high degree of agreement was found in the responses to the questionnaire, and on the basis of the material received the resolution “Choice and the Act of Dying” was developed. It was passed with a very substantial majority at the 1993 Annual Meeting. It clearly covers the issues dealt with in the 1973 and 1976 resolutions. It also supports efforts to increase the availability of palliative care so that terminally ill patients will be better supported as they make their individual choices. In September 1994, representatives of the CUC appeared before the Senate Committee on Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide to testify on the basis of our resolution. A later statement on the Latimer case clarified the limits of our policy; that is that *mentally competent, terminally or irreversibly ill persons* can determine the manner of their dying, but that our policy does not advocate mercy killing without the clear permission of the person involved. This policy permits us to respond to legislation proposed to extend or limit personal freedom to determine the manner of one’s own death, and to respond to individual cases as they arise. It also allows us to advocate for adequate palliative care and other supports for the terminally ill. It does not allow us to support mercy killing of people who are unable to make decisions for themselves.

This summary is based on resolutions from 1973, 1976, and 1993.



CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL - CONSEIL UNITARIEN DU CANADA

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