

Interfaith Statement on Suicide Prevention

Saskatchewan, September 10, 2020

Life is a sacred gift. Across all religious and theological distinctions, a shared understanding that the Creator has given us the precious gift of life establishes a global ethic that connects all people of faith. Our response to the divine gift of life compels us to work for the preservation of life in all its wonder, beauty, and diversity. We share a collective responsibility to care for those who are struggling, to offer hope and support, and to work for a society in which all can flourish.

The *Walking with Our Angels* vigil by Tristen Durocher has drawn our attention to the urgency of suicide prevention in Saskatchewan. We also note that today is World Suicide Prevention Day. Research in suicide prevention points to the need for all sectors of society to be engaged in suicide prevention, including government, faith communities, social services, health care, education, justice, and corrections.

As leaders of faith communities in Saskatchewan, we call upon our faith communities, the Government of Saskatchewan, and all sectors of our society to work together to establish a comprehensive and effective suicide prevention strategy. This could include but is not limited to legislation, policy, and programs that address common risk factors for suicide, that educate and create awareness of suicide risk, and that build local capacity to address the needs of youth, young adults, and Indigenous people within our communities.

An average of 10 people die of suicide every day in Canada, approximately 144 per year in Saskatchewan. Suicide is the second leading cause of death for youth between 15 and 24 years and the leading cause of death in northern Saskatchewan for people between the ages of 10 and 49. First Nations, Métis, and Inuit have considerably higher rates of suicide, especially among youth. Youth that identify as LGBTQ experience thoughts of suicide or suicide-related behaviour more frequently than their peers.

For every death by suicide, there are an additional 5 people hospitalized for self-inflicted injury, 25 to 30 people who attempt suicide, and 7 to 10 friends, family or acquaintances who are severely affected by the loss. Survivors of suicide and those close to them are at significantly elevated risk of suicide. In each age group, 70-85% of deaths by suicide are of males. Women have higher rates of self-harm leading to hospitalization and a heightened risk of future suicide.¹

The goals of this Interfaith Statement are to express our support for people and communities struggling with suicide, to invite our faith communities to pray and work for a solution to the

¹ Statistics derived from the Public Health Agency of Canada analysis of Statistics Canada Vital Statistics Death Database and Canadian Institute for Health Information Hospital Morbidity Database. Published data underestimate the total number of deaths by suicide, due, in part, to the stigma of suicide and other factors that may lead family members, health professionals, coroners, and others to avoid labelling or reporting deaths as suicides.

epidemic of suicide among Indigenous and youth in Saskatchewan, and to call upon all sectors to work together to enact a comprehensive and long-term suicide prevention strategy.

Endorsed by:

Most Rev. Bryan Bayda, Ukrainian Catholic Bishop of Saskatoon

Most Rev. Donald Bolen, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Regina

Most Rev. Murray Chatlain, Roman Catholic Archbishop of Keewatin-Le Pas

Rev. Karen Fraser Gitlitz, Saskatoon Unitarians

Rev. Tricia Gerhard, Executive Chairperson, Living Skies Regional Council, United Church of Canada

Most Rev. Mark Hagemoen, Roman Catholic Bishop of Saskatoon

The Rt. Revd. Adam Halkett, Bishop of Missinippi, Anglican Church of Canada

Mr. Spencer Hanson, Moderator, Synod of Saskatchewan, Presbyterian Church in Canada

The Rt. Revd. Rob Hardwick, Bishop of Qu'Appelle, Anglican Church of Canada

Rt. Rev. Christopher Harper, Bishop of Saskatoon, Anglican Church of Canada

Bishop Sid Haugen, Saskatchewan Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Canada

The Rt. Revd. Michael Hawkins, Bishop of Saskatchewan, Anglican Church of Canada

Rabbi Claudio Jodorkovsky, Congregation Agudas Israel, Saskatoon

Imam Mohamed Masloh, Islamic Association of Saskatchewan (Regina)

Fr. Jakob Palm, Holy Covenant Evangelical Orthodox Church, Saskatoon

Rabbi Jeremy Parnes, Beth Jacob Synagogue, Regina

Edward Robertson, Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Regina

Most Rev. Albert Thévenot, Roman Catholic Bishop of Prince Albert

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Faith communities are invited to visit the *Walking with Our Angels* vigil at 7pm on Thursday to join in a brief period of interfaith prayer for suicide prevention. Please wear a mask and practice physical distancing. The *Walking with Our Angels* vigil is on the west lawn in front of the Legislature. Free parking is available on Legislative Drive (20th Avenue) in front of the Legislature.

There is hope. Suicide can be prevented. Help is out there. You are not alone.

If you are in crisis:

- Contact a call centre in Canada near you: www.suicideprevention.ca/thinking-about-suicide/find-a-crisis-centre/
- Call Kids Help Phone 1-800-668-6868
- Find someone you trust and let them know