

STOP suicide

*If the family is the sanctuary of life,
The place where life is conceived and cared for,
It is a horrendous contradiction when it becomes
A place where life is rejected and destroyed.*

(*Amoris Laetitia: On Love in the Family*, 2016; Pope Francis)

When we read the above words, we may picture many different ways of rejecting and destroying life. We may even cast blame on certain individuals within the family. What is heart breaking, especially as I write this reflection, are the numbers of children and youth who struggle with suicidal and self harm thoughts. These individuals may even make attempts to take their own lives and may or may not succeed.

Our Canadian media has drawn attention to the concerns and needs of many First Nations families. It has been noted that suicide is one of the most urgent problems facing Aboriginal communities. Other research supports that to assist communities, especially the most isolated; a number of issues need to be addressed i.e. mental health, identity struggles, unemployment, housing, violence and substance abuse.

Suicide is not limited to our Canadian First Nations but is, in fact, a national and international matter of grave concern and urgency. In Canada there are approximately 3,500 deaths from suicide per year. This number is slightly below deaths due to colon and breast cancer.

A 2004 survey of 21 advanced nations found that Canada was among 10 lacking 'country wide integrated activities carried out

by the government' to address suicide. In many countries the United Nations 1995 guidelines for suicide prevention have not been implemented.

Suicide is a reality that has a connection with most of us, if not all of us. In our towns and cities, in our schools and churches, in our hospitals and homes suicide is horrifically close. We also are appalled when government legislation makes it legal to have assisted death by suicide.

In the face of this reality, we grieve with the families; we bury those who thought that suicide was the only answer to their inner pain; we offer courses on recognizing the signs of possible suicidal tendencies; we keep a watchful eye on all age groups and we try to pray without ceasing for those we know to be vulnerable to death by suicide; and we are extra vigilant when we hear of some youth, consumed with social media, forming possible death pacts.

Not wanting to be caught up in a sense of helplessness

What is our invitation and response, as Church, to the crisis of suicide?

Sr. Teresa Morrison, CPS

