

Quebec cardinal returns Order of Canada medal to protest Morgentaler

STE.-ANNE-DE-BEAUPRE, Quebec - Flanked by the bishops of Quebec, Cardinal Jean-Claude Turcotte of Montreal announced he was handing back his 1996 Order of Canada medal to protest that the same award was given to an abortion physician this summer.

"I renounce the honor of the Order of Canada awarded to me," Cardinal Turcotte told a Sept. 11 press conference at the Assembly of Quebec Catholic Bishops in Ste.-Anne-de-Beaupre, near Quebec City. "I am thus returning the medal that was given to me."

The cardinal said he decided to return the medal because of the July 1 announcement that the same honor was being awarded to Dr. Henry Morgentaler, whose 19-year legal battle led to the lifting of the country's restrictions on abortion.

"Until now, I believed that the Order of Canada was awarded to people in the presence of a positive consensus about their achievements," Cardinal Turcotte said.

Adding that he was absent from Canada when the award to Morgentaler was announced, Cardinal Turcotte said he had hoped that in the face of widespread protest against the nominee, the board of the Order of Canada award would review its decision.

"But as up to now this has not been the case, and a silence on my part could be misinterpreted, my conscience obliges me to reaffirm my convictions regarding respect for life from conception until death," he said.

"We are not masters of human life," the cardinal added.

Cardinal Turcotte is the third person to have renounced their Order of Canada award because of its presentation to Morgentaler. A British Columbia priest, Father

Lucien Larre, and the former lieutenant-governor of New Brunswick, Gilbert Finn, returned their medals earlier.

Although the cardinal denied that the timing of his announcement – at the beginning of the Canadian federal election campaign – had any significance, he also told Canadians, “The issue is one that voters must take into consideration when they exercise their right to vote.”

“Candidates should ask themselves, ‘Do I follow the majority or do I follow my conscience?’” he said.