



A MESSAGE FROM THE INTERNATIONAL ECCLESIASTICAL ASSISTANT

June 2017

I don't know if members of CICIAMS are aware of this, but on February 11 of this year – the Feast of our Lady of Lourdes and the 25th World Day for the Sick – the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers (now part of the new Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development) published the *New Charter for Health Care Workers*. This is an updating of the 1995 document. At present it is available only in Italian, but an English translation of the new charter will be published later this year with a French translation available soon thereafter (I hope).

The document keeps the same general format as its predecessor, dealing with medical ethical issues under the headings of “procreation,” “life,” and “death.” It is slightly longer than its predecessor, having 171 paragraphs as opposed to 150. Much of the content of the former document remains in the new charter, with medical issues not included in the 1995 edition (some not even known in 1995) accounting for much of the added length.

The new charter also makes extensive use of documents of the Magisterium published since the earlier edition, especially Pope St. John Paul II's encyclical, *Evangelium vitae* and the declaration published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas personae*. The Italian version of the 1995 edition was completed prior to the Pope John Paul II's encyclical, and although there are a few references to the encyclical in the 1995 English edition, these were actually made after the charter was written and placed in the footnotes without any actual reference in the text of the document. In the new charter, such references are fully integrated into the text.

Under the heading of “procreation,” the new charter again first treats the dignity of human procreation, quoting extensively from Vatican II's *Gaudium spes*, Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae vitae*, and Pope Saint John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium vitae*. Within this context, the document treats both the attempts to regulate procreation and the variety of forms of medically-assisted procreation. The document adds an extensive treatment of sterilization after its discussion of contraception. Based on more up-to-date research, it has also extensively revised its treatment of artificial fertilization, discussing related areas such as pre-implantation diagnosis and the cryopreservation of ova and embryos.

The new charter has moved its treatment of abortion and the suppression of nascent life from its previous place, under the heading of “death,” and has now placed it under the heading of “life.” The document explains that as part of their professional fidelity Catholic health care workers must not tolerate any suppression of life. It then goes into detail

concerning ethical guidance in a wide variety of circumstances regarding nascent life, from bedside issues such as ectopic pregnancy, anencephaly, and so-called embryo reduction, to societal issues such as dealing with pro-abortion legislation and the importance of conscience clauses to protect professional care givers from performing immoral procedures. In this section, much of the moral analysis comes from *Dignitas personae*, published by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in 2008.

The new charter also expands the section on “prevention” with the addition of a sub-section on vaccines, with special attention to those vaccines that have been developed from illicit material, again basing its discussion on *Dignitas personae*. The document has moved the discussion of genetics from the heading of “procreation” to that of “life.” Genomics and genetic therapies are both given fuller treatment, as these areas have become much more important since the writing of the first edition of the charter. Also added is a section on stem cell research and therapies, both those using embryonic stem cells and those using adult stem cells, under the rubric “regenerative medicine.”

The least changed section is the third section, dealing with death. With the exception of those sub-sections that have been moved to other places in the document, this section closely follows the 1995 charter. One of the few additions is paragraph 152 dealing with medically-assisted nutrition and hydration, quoting from the response by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, explaining that such care is “ordinary and proportionate to the extent to which, and for as long as, it is shown to accomplish its proper finality, which is the hydration and nourishment of the patient.”

There does not seem to be a need to change CICIAMS’s *Ethics Guidelines*, since the guidelines are based upon the same documents as the new charter. The charter should rather be seen as going more deeply into several of the issues covered by the *Ethics Guidelines* and therefore should be welcomed by members of CICIAMS.

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Before I close, I would like to inform all of you of my change of ministries. On June 21 of this year, I was elected as Provincial of my Franciscan Province of the Sacred Heart in the United States. I will leave my current ministry at the Catholic Health Association on July 7. I will remain the ecclesial assistant of CICIAMS. Please pray for me in this new ministry. I will soon change my e-mail account and will inform Geraldine and Donatus of my new e-mail address when I receive it.

May God bless all of you,

Fr. Tom Nairn, OFM