



# Ethically Speaking...

Newsletter of the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute  
at Assumption University

Winter 2016

## Ethically Speaking...

provides news and information from the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute at Assumption University.

### Executive Director

Fr. Leo Walsh, CSB.

### Bioethics Staff:

Fr. Michael Prieur

Richard Corneil

Maria Giannotti

### Contact Us:

We welcome comments and feedback, please contact us at :

The Canadian Catholic  
Bioethics Institute at  
Assumption University  
400 Huron Church Road, #204  
Windsor, ON N9C 2J9

Phone: 519.973.7033 Ext. "0"  
Email: [CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca](mailto:CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca)



## News, Events & Updates:

For the People in the Pews Program: This past November Most Precious Blood Parish graciously hosted the first "For the People in the Pews" program. Fr. Greg Bonin shared these thoughts with us:

*For People in the Pews was well received by the people of Most Precious Blood Parish, Windsor. When unexpectedly confronted with moral and ethical dilemmas many people may find themselves at a loss and seek guidance. That guidance was received well by those who attended all four sessions. We were blessed to have Maria Giannotti and Father Leo Walsh as our Theologians and specialist to present. I encourage other seminars to keep taking place to spread this wonderful Good News in our places of work, worship, or anywhere where people will receive the same guidance and teachings as we did. Kudos to The People in the Pews!*  
Father Gregory J. Bonin Pastor Most Precious Blood Church Windsor, Ontario.

Some of the participants sent cards, letters and emails about their experience: "Our parents are elderly and this program gave us information about decisions that have to be made at the end of life. It was very informative! We were able to discuss things others in the group and with Maria and others who attended and found it very helpful. "I would recommend this program to others in who have elderly parents or are facing situations at the end of life and unsure about Catholic teaching. I know it would be as helpful to them as it was to us. I look forward to hearing about other programs that would be beneficial to us as Catholics!" - Patricia Bezaire and Barbara Leveque

*We thoroughly enjoyed Fr. Walsh and Maria's seminar. The program was presented in layman's terms, engaging and challenging each member of the audience. The four sessions provided much knowledge and many tools to express with conviction, the Catholic Teachings on Moral and Ethical Issues. Now with informed minds, gained from this presentation, and God's guidance our future decision-making issues will be embraced with confidence. Thank you so much for empowering and enlightening us....we are most grateful!* - Mary and Pat Kennedy

CCBI-A thanks Fr. Greg Bonin, Christine Coyle, and all the participants for a very successful launch!

*Thank you*

# Do We Know What's At Stake?: The Importance of Educating Catholics in Bioethics

Some of the most difficult decisions we will ever make are healthcare decisions for ourselves or our loved ones. Anecdotal evidence suggests there exists an information deficit for patients and families when it comes to healthcare ethics and decision-making and there are a number of issues that complicate our decision-making process:

**Knowledge deficit-** Physicians and nurses spend years studying and working with diseases and illness and therefore may be the only ones who fully understand what is being explained to a patient about a diagnosis or therapeutic intervention. Often times after a clinician has explained a diagnosis and asked if there are any questions, patients will indicate they understand only to turn and ask, "What did he say?" once the clinician has left.

This knowledge deficit creates a power imbalance and making it difficult to make informed decisions. Without an adequate understanding



of what is being asked or explained we cannot fully appreciate the consequences of our choices.

**Circumstances and timing of the decision** -When medical information is presented or a decision is required as a result of a medical emergency or an unexpected diagnosis we often feel overwhelmed and confused about how to proceed particularly when our loved ones cannot speak for themselves and have made no clear statement regarding their wishes or preferences.

**Values, Beliefs and Principles** - Although clinicians are knowledgeable and competent in their area of specialty they often do not 'know' us personally therefore may not take into consideration our personal values or beliefs.



It is for these reasons the Church provides us with bioethical principles grounded in Catholic teaching in order to assist us, our healthcare professionals, and families in making decisions that respect the sacredness and dignity of every human person as a child of God.

**Sanctity of life from conception to natural death** -All life is a gift and each of us is created in the image of God and thus we have a special place in His creation. "Human life is sacred because from its beginning it involves the creative action of

God and it remains forever in a special relationship with the Creator, Who is its sole end. God alone is the Lord of life from its beginning until its end; no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being." (Donum Vitae 5)

**Dignity of every human life independent of other values**

Some argue that certain human lives are better than others depending on the value and worth to society. The Catholic Church proclaims that the dignity of the human person is the foundation of a moral vision for society. This belief guides all the principles of our social teaching. Catholic teaching holds that every person has innate dignity and "these human rights depend neither on single individuals nor on parents; nor do they represent a concession

made by society and the state; they belong to hu-



man nature and are inherent in the person by virtue of the creative act from which the person took their origin." (CCC#2273)

Along with these major principles Catholic teaching recognizes the importance of the principle of truth telling.

## Do We Know What's at Stake? (continued)

Without the truth, either about one's medical condition or the teaching of the Church, one is not in a position to be informed or properly assert one's autonomy. As Catholics we are also called to uphold the *common good*, simply stated, "all for one, one for all". We must be mindful that one's good is intimately related to the common good. "*It is imperative that no one would indulge in a merely individualistic morality. The best way to fulfill one's obligations of justice and love is to contribute to the common good according to one's means and the needs of others...*" (Vatican Council "Joy and Hope" 30).

As Catholics it is important to educate ourselves about the implication of these principles far in advance of when they are needed. The Church provides a number of resources online including magisterial texts and teachings that address theological reflections by the Church on these topics. It is important to search out resources that can help inform hearts and minds about such important issues long before one is faced with a crisis.

Locally, **The Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute at Assumption University** can provide assistance and resources to help navigate ethical decisions you may face in your healthcare journey. The Institute offers "For People in the Pews" lecture series. Sessions aim to inform participants about complex bioethical issues, and encourage discussion and dialogue about Catholic teaching on topics such as reproductive technology, palliative care, advance care planning physician assisted dying, euthanasia and the spiritual needs of the sick and dying. This 4 part series is designed to raise awareness, answer questions and help Catholics understand emerging issues in health care ethics and the Church's response to them. *For more information about the program please contact: CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca*

*Maria Giannotti B.Ed MA, MS Bioethics ©*

### Reference

Father Peter Laird Archdiocese of St. Paul, Minneapolis [http://www.archspm.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Making\\_Sense\\_of\\_Bioethics.pdf](http://www.archspm.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Making_Sense_of_Bioethics.pdf) December 12, 2009

Beauchamp, T.L., Childress, J.F. (1994) Principles of Bioethics. Fourth Edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

[http://www.nythamar.com/MED\\_biomedethics\\_summary.pdf](http://www.nythamar.com/MED_biomedethics_summary.pdf)

Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2258 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

Catechism of the Catholic Church # 2273 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

Compendium of the Catholic Church paragraph 198

Catechism of the Catholic Church #2467 and 2472 [http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_INDEX.HTM)

Fundamental Principles of Catholic Social Teaching [http://www.romancatholic.kingston.on.ca/Fundamental%20Principles%20of%20Catholic%20Social%20Teaching%20\(July%202012\).pdf](http://www.romancatholic.kingston.on.ca/Fundamental%20Principles%20of%20Catholic%20Social%20Teaching%20(July%202012).pdf)



# In Sickness and in Health

There is much talk at the moment about the possibility of divorced and remarried Catholics being permitted to receive Holy Communion. One side considers such a permission to be a betrayal of the teaching of Jesus about the nature of marriage. The other side promotes pastoral forgiveness and compassion as being in no contradiction to Jesus' teaching. Both sides want to uphold the heart and substance of the teaching.

The traditional wording of the marriage vows declares, "... to have and to hold..... in sickness and in health... till death do us part." I remember so well over sixty years ago, a young man of our town marrying the most beautiful young woman I had ever seen till that time who lived down our street. It



was like a fairytale wedding. Two years later, the bride had a total and irreversible mental collapse and was institutionalized for the rest of her life. The young man never did remarry. I don't know what modern canonists would make of this in terms of annulment, but I was always in awe of the husband's determination to live out his faith as it was proposed to him then.

Alzheimer's and dementia seem to be encountered more and more today. Maybe it's because we are living longer; maybe for other reasons. Again, I am amazed at the number of older spouses who travel even daily to be with their beloved, even when recognition has gone, just being there, holding a hand, uttering words of encouragement and love.



Good healthcare professionals are of great worth. Volunteers in healthcare settings are truly admirable. But no group can offer the care and love of a faithful spouse to an ailing wife or husband.

How the problem beset the church concerning the divorced and remarried will be resolved remains to be seen. What is certain, though, is that when a marriage "takes", when husband and wife have loved each other through challenges and problematic times, there is no higher example of God's love for each of us, evident so well through, "...in sickness and in health, till death do us part."



*Fr. Leo Walsh csb*

**Ethically Speaking** provides news, articles and information from the Canadian Catholic Bioethics Institute at Assumption University in Windsor Ontario. We welcome comments and feedback. Should you have suggestions for future articles or inserts, please contact the Editor at [CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca](mailto:CCBI-A@assumptionu.ca)

## CCBI-A Staff:

Rev. Leo Walsh, CSB, STL, STD

Rev. Michael Priour, BA, BTh, STL, STD

Richard Corneil, PhD (c)

Maria Giannotti, BA, BEd, MA, MS(c)

Executive Director VP Academics, Assumption University

Professor of Moral and Sacramental Theology

Moral Theology, Principal, Chief Administrator Assumption

Editor & Consultant Clinical Ethics, Catholic Healthcare