

Address by Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski
President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers
to the Catholic Health Governance Conference of Australia
Sydney, 15th April 2013

Your Excellency Archbishop Denis Hart, *President of the Australian Catholic Bishop's Conference*

My brother Bishops, Archbishop Philip Wilson and Bishop Mark Coleridge,

Rev. Sr. Annette Cunliffe, RSC, *President of Catholic Religious Australia,*

Ms Rowena McNally, *Chair of Catholic Health Australia,*

Mr. Martin Laverty, *CEO Catholic Health Australia,* who has worked around the clock for the success of this visit,

Reverend Fathers, the religious and all you Health Care Workers. It is a great pleasure for me to join you here in Australia, the Great South Land of the Holy Spirit. It is a time for me to bring the greetings of the Holy Father, Pope Francis, to share the international message of Catholic health and aged care and to further explore the great treasure that Catholic health and aged care services are here in Australia.

The Mandate of the Lord

One of the Church's great themes in recent years has been that of the New Evangelisation. As you are aware the Synod of Bishops, convoked by Pope Benedict XVI last October in Rome, reflected on the subject of the *new evangelisation for the transmission of Christian faith*, which is of great contemporary relevance and central as regards pastoral care. We at the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, addressed the same subject during our twenty-seventh international conference, which took place in the Vatican on 15-17 November around the theme: *The Hospital, Setting for Evangelisation, a Human and Spiritual Mission*. The reason for the choice of the subject is to be found at the very heart of the mandate that the Lord Jesus gave to his

disciples when he sent them out alone on their mission for the first time: ‘As you go, make this proclamation: ‘The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, drive out demons. Without cost you have received; without cost you are to give’ (*Mt 10:7-8*). And, indeed, on the basis of this mandate are justified two essential and inseparable activities of the Church which are always of contemporary relevance: the proclaiming of the Gospel and care for sick people.

As the Blessed John Paul II reminded us very eloquently in his *Motu Proprio Dolentium Hominum* of 1985: ‘over the course of the centuries the Church has felt strongly that service to the sick and suffering is an integral part of her mission, and not only has she encouraged among Christians the blossoming of various works of mercy, but she has also established many religious institutions within her with the specific aim of fostering, organizing, improving and increasing help to the sick.’¹

From this point of view, to invest human and material energies and resources in the health-care institutions of the Church, like her presence and her role in the management of non-confessional health-care institutions, is justified by the need to express the mercy of God towards all men and in a special way towards those who are tested by illness and by suffering. This is a way of living concretely the commandment of love of God and of neighbour in the contemporary world.

Therefore in our context, operating Catholic health and aged care services, that is where we are called to promote New Evangelisation for the transmission and testimony of the Christian faith, that is where we ought to be the people who share the Good News of Jesus Christ with those around us.

Health and Aged Care as Setting for the New Evangelisation

While the Catholic Church and other Churches around the Western world face the reality of lower church attendance, we are also seeing a growth in the number of people interested in accessing our ministries – hospitals, aged care services, schools, social services and so on.

I am aware that here in Australia, the Catholic health and aged care network is growing quickly. Since the turn of this century, your hospital network has grown from 55 hospitals to more than 70. And aged care services,

¹ John Paul II, *Motu Proprio Dolentium Hominum*, n. 1.

including more than 22,000 residential aged care beds across your services, are growing rapidly in Australia and around the world as populations age.

It is obviously a source of joy that Catholic ministries are growing in many parts of the world, but as Pope Francis said in his first homily after being chosen as the successor of St Peter, a Catholic ministry cannot simply become a compassionate and caring non-government organisation. It must be distinctive. As His Holiness said, “if we do not profess Jesus Christ, things go wrong”.²

Challenges

Throughout the Church’s proud history of providing health and aged care services, witnessing to Christ has been something of a given – something that was simply understood – because of the influence and presence of religious women, in particular, but also religious men and the clergy.

As Catholic ministries around the world adapt to the changing landscape of religious life, it is important that the distinctiveness of those ministries is not lost. The Church is fortunate to be able to draw upon lay people with a deep love for the Gospel message to seamlessly carry on the work of religious orders and dioceses, ensuring that the Face of Christ continues to shine on those with whom they come into contact.

For many ministries, this is an evolving process. For others, including many in Australia, the process is already well under way and lay women and men are doing a fine job in ensuring the ministries remain faithful to the founding vision of the Gospel.

The institutional Church, and organisations like Catholic Health Australia, have an important role to play in supporting and encouraging those lay people given such an important responsibility. This conference is one such way in which Catholic health and aged care services can ensure that those who are entrusted to be Stewards of the Mission can do so with a clear understanding of the important tasks they have.

I have also been introduced to resources like the Guide for Understanding the Governance of Catholic Health and Aged Care Services and the Mission Discernment Resource, which offer valuable information addressing the opportunities and challenges of lay leadership in an Australian context.

² Francis, *Homily at the “Missa Pro Ecclesia” with the Cardinal Electors*, 14 March 2013.

One of the important Catholic principles that both those publications emphasise is the Church's preferential option for the poor. It is one of the fundamental aspects of Catholic Social Teaching throughout the ages and it's something that Pope Francis has emphasised in his first few weeks as leader of the world's 1.2 billion Catholics.

I do not need to tell you that this preferential option for the poor was the driving force behind the establishment of so many Catholic ministries – health care, aged care, education, social services and so on. Catholic schools and hospitals were intentionally established in response to the needs and circumstances of the weakest and most vulnerable.

These services are following the example of the Good Samaritan (*Lk* 20:25-37), who came across a person in need and responded to his plight with compassion and practical care. The role of a Catholic hospital or aged care service is to see the woman in need, to see the man calling out for help, and to be the person that lifts them up, places them on the metaphorical donkey and seeks to provide physical and spiritual wellness.

Your own St Mary of the Cross MacKillop, Australia's first saint, had a similar emphasis that drove her. As she said, "Never see a need without doing something about it." For more than 150 years, that's what Catholic health and aged care services have been doing in this country, constantly adapting to meet the needs of the current time and seeing opportunities to deliver care.

Catholic services in Australia run public and private hospitals; you run residential aged care services and care for older people in their homes; you deliver babies and conduct ground-breaking research. You do it all in a country that is undoubtedly secular, but do it with almost unanimous support from civic leaders and the general public.

In recent years, the Church's interaction with people of other faiths – and those of no faith – has broadened remarkably. That has, like so many aspects of Catholic health and aged care, created a great number of opportunities and a small dose of challenges; challenges for which we continue to strive to find appropriate and faithful responses.

Later this week, I will visit Perth and the site of the new Catholic public hospital that St John of God Health Care will operate on behalf of the state government. I hear questions were raised about the appropriateness of Catholic

providers operating public hospitals. I will tomorrow see evidence of how 155 years after the Sisters of Charity established a hospital in Sydney, now St Vincent's Hospital, public health care is being successfully delivered with an unashamedly Catholic mission.

We have also seen a fairly significant shift in the reach of Catholic services. Whereas 30 or 40 years ago there was a very clear divide between Catholics and non-Catholics, that delineation no longer exists, partly because of the visionary work of Vatican II's Council Fathers. It would have seemed unthinkable before the Council to observe Buddhist or Hindu chaplains walking the halls of Catholic hospitals, providing spiritual care to their adherents, but that is the reality of today's multicultural, multifaith world.

Pope Francis, speaking to the Vatican diplomatic corps last month, said that his wish was to build bridges connecting all people, "in such a way that everyone can see in the other not an enemy, not a rival, but a brother or sister to be welcomed and embraced".³ That is what our ministries are doing. Moreover, illness is a challenge that knows no boundaries of religion or race or social status.

This multicultural, multifaith and secular world also presents other challenges that the Church has been solving. As the world around us embraces medical technologies that offer ethical challenges, the Church draws upon its acquired wisdom to find a way forward. Later this year, for example, a new clinic will open in South Australia that looks to faithfully respond to the agonising situation of married couples who are unable to begin a family. The Church's view on these issues is clear, and its view can be aligned with modern science to find an ethical way to help couples in that situation.

Similarly, there has been much discussion in recent years about the value of stem cell research. The Church has encouraged and even funded research on adult stem cells, but has warned against the immorality of harvesting human embryos for the sake of medical research. And, as we've seen around the world and here in Australia, adult stem cells are providing medical breakthroughs without the ethical concerns of embryonic stem cell research. In order to remain a truly human endeavour, health care must faithfully respond to new challenges with respect for the dignity of all involved. Scientific research and its application ought to be given moral evaluation in reference to the dignity of the

³ Francis, *Address to the Diplomatic Corps Accredited to the Holy See*, 22 March 2013.

human person. Indeed “science and technology must be at the service of the human person, of his inalienable rights and his true and integral good according to the design and will of God.”⁴

The Catholic Church says “Yes” to people who find themselves in need of assistance, and that includes saying “Yes” to efforts to keep them healthy. While we are here to discuss health and aged care services, many of the Catholic providers in this country, in conjunction with Catholic Health Australia, recognise that there is much work to be done outside of the health system to stop people needing health care in the first instance.

The social determinants of health are the building blocks that can predict how healthy – or not – someone will be. When we see someone who is living without a job, isn’t receiving an education, doesn’t have safe and secure housing, we can predict that person will have health problems in their future. Catholic Social Teaching paints a very clear picture to support work to address the social determinants of health, and there is much work being done in Australia that should be applauded.

Last year, speaking at the World Health Assembly, I underlined the role of Church ministries – more than 120,000 around the world – in working with governments to ensure everyone who needs services can receive them. In remote areas, in rural areas and even across borders, Catholic agencies are delivering care where others don’t or can’t.⁵ While some providers and even governments look at the delivery of health and aged care through a purely economic lens, the Church does not and cannot fall into that trap.

When I read of Australian organisations working to improve the health of the people in Timor Leste who suffered so much in recent decades, I see the face of Christ at work. When I see Catholic ministries reaching out to Indigenous Australians who are homeless or have addictions or both and caring for them, I see Christ’s hands. When I see the Church serving more than a quarter of the people living with HIV and Aids around the world, I see Christ’s presence in those places.

⁴ Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith, *Instruction on Respect for Human Life in its Origin and on the Dignity of Procreation*, n.2.

⁵ Cf. Zygmunt Zimowski, *Intervention of the Holy See Delegation to the 65th World Health Assembly, Geneva, May 2012*, n. 3.

Just over two weeks ago, Pope Francis said in his Easter message *Urbi et Orbi*, to the city of Rome and to the world, that he wanted the message of Christ's resurrection to reach every house, every family, and especially those where the suffering is greatest – in hospitals and in prisons, among other places.⁶

It is important that Church leaders seek to provide clear messages about what the Church teaches, but is our nurses and aged care assistants and doctors and administrative staff and CEOs who are witnesses of Christ to those we encounter in our hospitals and aged care services. It is nice for me to travel the world, make petitions to the United Nations and support Catholic ministries like those here in Australia, but I can only seek to be a witness to those I encounter. With tens of thousands of people working in Catholic health and aged care in this country, it's an opportunity that can't be missed.

In your work, the challenge every day is to proclaim the message of Jesus Christ, who lived, died, and rose from the dead to those we meet in our lives. We know it is a challenge to proclaim Christ in the contemporary society, it is a challenge that you are meeting, and on behalf of the Church, I thank you for keeping Christ at the centre of all you do.

May God continue to bless you and your services to the people of Australia.

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⁶ Cf. Francis, *Urbi et Orbi Message*, Easter 2013.