

## PREFACE

*After long, careful, and multidisciplinary preparation, the Charter for Health Care Workers is now being published at the initiative of the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers.*

*Nothing happens by chance in human affairs, and even chronological coincidence can have symbolic meanings. In fact, the long-awaited document is being published a few months after the institution (February 11, 1994), by the Holy Father, John Paul II, of the Pontifical Academy for Life, which ideally, operatively and in its statutory finality is closely associated with the tasks of the Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers.*

*And this Council cannot but feel flattered that the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith approved and quickly confirmed in its entirety the text of the Charter submitted to it: another reason for its full validity and secure authority, but also a concrete proof of the interdepartmental cooperation expressly desired in the Motu Proprio which set up the Pontifical Council for Pastoral Assistance to Health Care Workers.*

*There are many reasons for recommending knowledge, divulgation, and application of the directives contained in this deontological code for those engaged in health care. Its publication fills a lacuna which was strongly felt not only in the Church but also by all those who empathize with the primary task she fulfills of promoting and defending life.*

*The extraordinary advances of science and technology in the very vast field of health and medicine have produced an independent discipline called bioethics, or ethics of life. This explains why, especially from Pius XII onwards, the Magisterium of the Church has intervened with increasing interest, with consistent firmness, and ever more explicit directives concerning all the complex problems arising from the indissoluble bond between medicine and morality. None of these problems can be considered neutral at this time in relation to Hippocratic ethics and Christian morality. Hence the requirement, strictly respected in the Charter for Health Care Workers, for an organic and exhaustive synthesis of the Church's position on all that pertains to the affirmation, in the field of*

*medicine, of the primary and absolute value of life: of all of life and of the life of every human being.*

*Therefore, after an introduction on the figure and essential tasks of health care workers, or better, of the “ministers of life,” the Charter gathers its directives around the triple theme of procreation, life, and death. And so that—as often happens—doubtful interpretations may not prevail over the objective worth of the contents, in the drafting of the document the statements of the Supreme Pontiffs and authoritative texts issued by the Offices of the Roman Curia have almost always been quoted directly. These statements show conclusively that the position of the Church on the fundamental problems of bioethics, while safeguarding the sacred limits imposed by the promotion and defense of life, is highly constructive and open to true progress in science and technology, when this progress is welded to that of civilization.*

*At the beginning of the Charter the activity of the health care worker is said to be “a form of Christian witness.”*

*Humbly, but also proudly, we can say that this Charter for Health Care Workers is part of the “new evangelization” which, in service to life, especially for those who suffer, in imitation of Christ’s ministry, finds its characteristic expression.*

*The hope, then, is that this book/tool may become an integral part of the initial and ongoing formation of health care workers, so that their witness may be proof that the Church, in her defense of life, opens her heart and her arms to all people, since Christ’s message is addressed to all people.*

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