

Pas Evangelie in gezondheidszorg toe

Address of His Holiness Pope Francis to the World Federation of Catholic Medical Associations (FIAMC)



Pope Francis
28 May 2018

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I am pleased to welcome you and I greet all of you, beginning with your President, Dr. John Lee, whom I thank for his kind words.

As Catholic physicians, you are committed to an ongoing spiritual, moral and bioethical formation that enables you to bring the values and principles of the Gospel to your practice of medicine, from the doctor-patient relationship to missionary activity aimed at improving health conditions among peoples living on the peripheries of our world. Your work is a particular form of human solidarity and Christian witness, and is enriched by the spirit of faith. It is important that your Associations be concerned to make medical students and young physicians aware of these principles by involving them in your various activities.

Your Catholic identity poses no obstacle to your cooperation with those who, whether from a different religious perspective or with no specific creed, acknowledge the dignity and grandeur of the human person as the criterion of their activity. The Church is committed to life, and to ensuring that nothing opposed to life be imposed on any person, however frail or defenceless, underdeveloped or challenged, he or she may be. To be a Catholic physician thus means being a health care professional who finds in personal faith and communion with the Church a source of inspiration to grow constantly in Christian living and professional expertise, in tireless devotion to others and in the desire to learn and understand the laws of nature in order to serve life ever more effectively (cf. Paul VI, Encyclical *Humanae vitae*, 24).

Everyone is aware of the fidelity and consistency with which the Associations of your Federation have, down the years, maintained their Catholic identity and followed the Church's teaching and the directives of her Magisterium in the medical-moral field. This criterion of recognition and action has fostered your cooperation in the Church's mission of promoting and defending human life from conception to its natural end, out of concern for the quality of life, respect for the weakest, the humanization of medicine and its full socialization.

This fidelity frequently entails hardships and difficulties that, in certain situations, call for great courage. I encourage you to persevere with serenity and conviction along this path, receiving the magisterial interventions in the areas of medicine with an awareness of their moral implications. For the fields of medicine and health care have not been immune to the advance of the technocratic cultural paradigm, the worship of unlimited human power and a practical relativism, wherein everything is considered irrelevant unless necessary for one's personal interests (cf. *Laudato Si'*, 122).

In this context, you are called upon to affirm the centrality of the patient as a person, together with his or her dignity and inalienable rights, especially the right to life. The tendency to view the sick as machines to be repaired, without respect for moral principles, and to exploit the weakest by discarding what does not respond

to the ideology of efficiency and profit, has to be resisted. The defence of the personal dimension of the patient is essential for the humanization of medicine, also in terms of “human ecology”. Make every effort, in your respective countries and on the international level, to speak out in specialized environments but also in debates about legislation dealing with sensitive ethical problems such as the termination of pregnancy, end-of-life issues and genetic medicine. Take care also to defend the freedom of conscience of physicians and of healthcare workers. It is not acceptable that your role should be reduced to that of a simple executor of the will of the patient or the requirements of the health-care system in which you work.

In your forthcoming Congress, to be held a few days from now in Zagreb, you will reflect upon the theme: “Sanctity of Life and the Medical Profession, from *Humanae vitae* to *Laudato Si*”. This too is evidence of your participation in the Church’s life and mission. This participation – as the Second Vatican Council made clear – “is so necessary within the Church communities that without it the apostolate of the pastors will frequently be unable to obtain its full effect” (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, 10). Be ever more aware that today it is necessary and urgent that the activity of the Catholic physician be unmistakably evident on the level of both personal and group witness.

In this regard, it is desirable that the activities of Associations of Catholic doctors be interdisciplinary and involve other ecclesial realities. In particular, consider how to coordinate your efforts with those of priests, men and women religious, and all engaged in pastoral care of the sick. Join them in being close to people who suffer; they are in great need of your help. Be ministers not only of care but also of fraternal charity, helping those with whom you come in contact by your knowledge, your great humanity and your evangelical compassion.

Dear brothers and sisters, so many people look to you and your work. Your words, your actions, your advice and your decisions have an echo far beyond the strictly professional sector and become, if consistent, a witness of lived faith. Your profession thus rises to the dignity of a true apostolate. I encourage you to carry forward the efforts of your Associations with joy and generosity, in cooperation with all those individuals and institutions that share a love for life and endeavour to serve it in its dignity and sanctity. May the Virgin Mary, *Salus Infirmorum*, sustain your efforts, which I accompany with my blessing. And please, pray also for me.

Thank you.