

SaskEthics

An Ethics Newsletter for Catholic Healthcare Organizations in Saskatchewan

Dignity gives us our purpose

Dear *SaskEthics* Readers,



It's time to return to our roots! Over the past year, I have had several very different ethics consults that have led me back to the most fundamental value of Catholic Health Care: Respect for the dignity of every human person. The Health Ethics Guide explains this value: "The lives of all persons possess an inherent dignity and worth that is independent of that which any other person or the state may bestow upon them. The basis for this dignity, in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is the belief that every human being is made in the image of God."

There is a lot to unpack in these two short sentences. To start with, it is important to note that the word 'dignity' has two definitions in the English dictionary. Catholic Health Care adopts the first definition, which sees dignity as something permanent and inviolable. However, many people use dignity in a second way, often as an adjective that describes how a person behaves. For

example, we might see someone in a fancy suit and think, "that person is dignified."

In Catholic Health Care we always need to remind ourselves that although the fancy suit might make it easier for us to see that person's dignity, it is NOT the source of his or her dignity. Every person has dignity, value and worth regardless of what they wear or how they behave.

As the Health Ethics Guide notes, the Judeo-Christian understanding of dignity is grounded in the belief that there is something special about humanity, namely that we are made in the image of God. Not every world philosophy shares this belief. For some, for example, dignity is only present when a person meets a certain threshold of cognitive ability. This understanding of dignity is incompatible with Catholic Health Care because it makes dignity contingent on how the person is evaluated by others.

When we take the time to see the dignity of the people around us, it changes how we respond to them. For example, imagine a care provider who is being yelled at by a patient. The care provider could decide that a person who is yelling is not worthy of her time. Or she could take a moment to be curious about the other person's

experience. Why is he upset? What led him to this moment? What would help him to feel safe?

While it can be hard to see dignity in others, sometimes it is even harder to see dignity in ourselves. The care provider's response to this person has the power to increase the person's sense of isolation and worthlessness, or to form the foundation for a healing relationship.

Simple actions, like putting down her own checklist to listen to what the person is trying to say, bringing him into a space with less stimuli, or offering him a glass of water or some food could go a long way towards building that relationship. These actions let the person know that the health care provider sees him as a human being, not as whatever disease brought him into her care.

Once you start to see the inherent worth of the person in front of you, it is impossible to walk away from their suffering. Dignity says more than just, "this person is valuable." It also urgently cries, "and you have to help them!" Catholic Health Care formed in response to this cry and continues to look for ways to reveal the dignity of the people we serve, especially in the moments when they cannot see it themselves.

What does your team do to ensure you recognize the dignity of the people you care for? What things get in the way of you recognizing

this dignity? How can you ensure that this recognition extends to families and other team members as well?

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Catholic Health
Association of Saskatchewan

2026 ANNUAL CONVENTION

**SHARED VISION, SACRED WORK:
GROWING HEALING COMMUNITIES.**

DETAILS:

Date:
October 29-30, 2026

Convention Venue
St. Joseph's Parish
260 25 St E,
Prince Albert, SK

Accommodations
**Best Western Premier
Prince Albert**
313, 38th St W Prince Albert, SK
Drop-date for room block:
September 19, 2026

PROGRAM DETAILS



The program also features breakout sessions—including Mary Heilman on AI and Michael MacFadden with a deeper look at palliative care—alongside an optional tour of Mont St. Joseph's Home.

Early Bird Deadline is October 4, 2026 at Noon

MEET OUR SPEAKERS:

Archbishop Susai Jesu, O.M.I.
Archbishop of Keewatin-Le Pas

Dr. James MacMillan
Physician Lead for the SHA
Palliative Care Provincial Clinical Network

Ryan Straschnitzki
Former Humboldt Broncos
Hockey Player

Carrie Dornstauber, RN
Executive Director at St. Paul's
Hospital and Hospice at Glengarda

Lecina Hicke, BA, CFRE
CEO of the St. Paul's Hospital
Foundation

Dr. Brian Chartier, PhD
Clinical Psychologist, Specializing
in Grief and Bereavement

Dr. Christine Taylor
Director of Evangelization and
Catechesis with Oversight of the
Diocesan Pastoral Care Ministries