



THE NATIONAL CATHOLIC BIOETHICS CENTER

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The NCBC and Catholic Parishes

The National Catholic Bioethics Center (NCBC) strives to draw on the light and life of Jesus Christ and the Catholic moral tradition to address ethical challenges facing the faithful. One of our most exciting major initiatives is our [parish membership program](#). This is a concrete way for the NCBC to reach Catholics in the pews who need our expert assistance.

Through daily interactions with the laity via our personal consultation service, NCBC ethicists have gained important insight and perspective on the challenges of living the Catholic faith in the modern world. Drawing on these experiences, we developed the parish membership program around two questions regarding what lay Catholics should know about medical decisions and the moral life more generally.

The first is, *If you live your life like a Catholic, do you want to die like one?* Each and every one of us will likely be confronted with difficult end-of-life ethical decisions for ourselves or a loved one in the future. We receive these types of questions all the time at the NCBC, but sometimes the request comes too late and should have been addressed earlier when the patient could have expressed his or her wishes clearly.

To ensure that Catholics can receive care consistent with their beliefs, we give a license to reprint *A Catholic Guide to End-of-Life Decision-Making* (includes a sample advance directive), *A Catholic Guide to Palliative Care and Hospice* (includes a questionnaire for evaluating hospice providers), and *A Catholic Guide to POLST* (includes a sample physician order for life-sustaining treatment). These publications have helped a great number of people..

The second is: *Are Catholics properly formed to apply Church teaching to unexpected situations that arise either in medicine or daily life?* To help fill this gap in adult catechesis, parishes that partner with the NCBC receive several bulletin inserts monthly for the faithful to read and get to know the Center's work. The pastor can at his discretion distribute all or some of these. We send Father Tad Pacholczyk's monthly "[Making Sense of Bioethics](#)" column that is carried by many diocesan newspapers both in the USA and internationally. We also provide a distillation of our bi-weekly [Bioethics Public Policy Report](#) that

provides news and information about current developments in bioethics that impact the dignity of the human person. These reports address developments on the federal, state, and international levels. *Finally, we send the member parishes our “Living the Catholic Life” newsletter that explores the principles of the moral life and their concrete application each month.*

My hope is that very large numbers of people will receive Catholic ethical assistance and education through this program. Once they know about the NCBC, they can contact us by email or telephone through our website for [personal consultations](#) if facing ethical dilemmas. We grew our website visitors and consultations to the highest numbers ever during the COVID-19 pandemic, but I want us to build on this to make the NCBC a household name among US Catholics.

We have been a trusted ethical resource for the bishops and Catholic health care ministries since the 1970s, and the NCBC has given free ethical guidance to individuals in need since the very beginning of the Center. It has proven very difficult, however, to let people know across this vast country that the NCBC exists and is at their service. The massive and expensive marketing campaigns this would require have always been beyond our rather modest resources. Nevertheless, a great expansion in our parish membership program could help to make the NCBC a familiar name to millions of Catholics.

The parish membership benefits are also available to smaller organizations who wish to [sign up](#). Instead of bulletin inserts, they can distribute our information and materials through their newsletters and other communications with their members. We have explored memberships with religious congregations, Catholic medical clinics, and law firms, as well as Knights of Columbus insurance offices.

A very fruitful initiative has been the sponsoring of an NCBC parish membership by local Knights of Columbus councils. This is very much in line with the mission of the Knights to serve the Church and pastors at the parish level. Individuals have also paid for an NCBC membership for their own parishes. I urge anyone who thinks this might be possible to contact our NCBC associate ethicist in charge of coordinating this program, Phil Cerroni (pcerroni@ncbcenter.org).

The NCBC is currently partnering with several dioceses to enroll all their parishes in our membership program. The dioceses of Worcester, MA, and Knoxville, TN, and the Archdiocese of New Orleans, LA, have already done so. There are quite a

few other dioceses that we are hoping will sign up their parishes soon, and we are approaching individual bishops who have a long history of working together with the NCBC.

I hope many will reach out to their pastors and dioceses about joining the NCBC parish membership program. It has the potential to provide moral guidance and raise the profile and name recognition of the NCBC as never before. It is our compassionate duty to assist as many of our brothers and sisters as we can who are facing ethical dilemmas with the light and truth of Catholic teaching. I appeal to you to help the NCBC to fulfill this mission.