

The Year of Faith for Catholic Health Care

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On October 11, 2012 the Roman Catholic Church began celebrating a Year of Faith, which continues until November 24, 2013. In calling for this Year of Faith, Pope Benedict XVI indicated several goals: to rediscover the joy of the encounter with Christ, to increase knowledge of the content of the Catholic faith through study of the Catechism of the Catholic Church, to read the documents of the Second Vatican Council, to intensify the witness of charity and to be credible witnesses to the faith (cf [Porta Fidei](#)). This Year of Faith provides an opportunity for Catholic health care professionals to discover the many treasures the Church has to support them in living their faith in their health care profession.

First, the Year of Faith is about Jesus Christ, about encountering Him, forming a relationship with Him and then allowing Him to change us into Himself. This encounter should most importantly be a source of joy, which is a value difficult to find in the health care workplace. If the diagnosis is a lack of joy, then the treatment is Jesus Christ, particularly in the Eucharist and in the Scripture.

Encountering Christ should awaken a desire to know more about Him and how to live according to His teachings. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* is the primary resource for the content of the faith. It shows what Catholic Christians believe, celebrate, live and pray. Health care professionals may be surprised to find out how many topics in the *Catechism* are related to health care. The accompanying article on the *Catechism* will describe this in more detail.

The *Catechism* is one of the fruits of the Second Vatican Council, which was convened to safeguard the content of the Catholic faith while examining new ways to present the faith to the modern world. The Council anticipated many of the difficulties and challenges confronted by health care professionals today. The Council also proposed the solution to those challenges. Of particular pertinence to health care professionals is the dignity of the human person. In health care today, the term “dignity” is used to promote and justify many actions and procedures, such as euthanasia, that actually undermine and violate the dignity of the human person. The Council also stressed the importance of the role of the laity to engage in the affairs of the world in order to direct them towards God and clarified the universal call to holiness. Holiness is not an exclusive pursuit of priests and religious. Everyone, including health care professionals, is called to live a life worthy of the Christian calling (cf [1 Cor 1:2](#)). The Additional Reading below provides links to selections from the Council documents which address these issues.

The witness of charity is classically expressed in Catholic tradition as the spiritual and corporal works of mercy. Charity is the love of God above all else, a love which then overflows to our neighbor. The health care professions by their very nature would seem to be an

expression of charity. However, not everyone in health care is a person of faith, and even those with faith, can struggle to find meaning in what they do. Pope Benedict reminds us, “Faith without charity bears no fruit, while charity without faith would be a sentiment constantly at the mercy of doubt” (*Porta Fidei*, 14). When the symptom is doubt, examining love for God, especially in the person of Jesus Christ, and the strength of faith, is the first step toward healing.

Lastly, knowing Jesus Christ causes daily life to be different. “The love of Christ impels us” ([2 Cor 5:14](#)) daily to be credible witnesses to Jesus Christ. To be a “credible witness” means that faith and daily choices must be aligned. It also means living in union with the Catholic Church. “A Christian may never think of belief as a private act...Profession of faith is an act both personal and communitarian” (*Porta Fidei* 10). Often this requires an openness to conversion, in order to believe, think and live differently than in the past. This conversion is a gift from God that requires cooperation with the graces provided, particularly through the sacraments. When health care professionals struggle to accept Church doctrine on issues such as contraception, marriage, abortion, and euthanasia, they must ask for the grace for understanding and conversion.

The Year of Faith will be fruitful to the degree that persons commit themselves to fulfilling its goals. The current secular culture is becoming more and more aggressive in pushing its values onto everyone, especially in health care. For Catholic Christians to be effective witnesses in this environment, firmness in faith is a necessity. This Year of Faith is a timely opportunity for fortification in the faith in order to face the challenges which lie ahead.

WORKS CITED

Pope Benedict XVI. *Porta Fidei*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana: Vatican City, 2010. Web. 19 February 2013.

ADDITIONAL READING

Catechism of the Catholic Church: on-line versions can be accessed through the [USCCB](#) or [Vatican](#) websites.

Second Vatican Council: click [here](#) to view all 16 documents of the Second Vatican Council or follow the specific links below:

[*Gaudium et Spes*](#): The Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World.

Chapter I: The Dignity of the Human Person: Jesus Christ “fully reveals man to himself and brings to light his most high calling” (GS 22).

Chapter IV: Role of the Church in the Modern World: On the laity: “Not only are they to animate the whole world with the spirit of Christianity, but they are to be witnesses to Christ in all circumstances and at the very heart of the community of mankind” (GS 43).

Lumen Gentium: The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church.

Chapter IV: The Laity: “By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will” (LG 31).

Chapter V: The Call to Holiness: “All the faithful are invited and obliged to holiness and the perfection of their own state of life” (LG 42).

Apostolicam Actuositatem: The Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People.

“Wherever there are people in need of food and drink, clothing, housing, medicine, employment, education; wherever men lack the facilities necessary for living a truly human life or are afflicted with serious distress or illness or suffer exile or imprisonment, there Christian charity should seek them out and find them, console them with great solicitude, and help them with appropriate relief. This obligation is imposed above all upon every prosperous nation and person” (AA 8).