



# IT'S TIME TO CONSIDER A CAREER IN CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE ETHICS

ETHICS LEADERSHIP IN CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE

## WHAT IS CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE?

Catholic health care is a ministry of the Catholic Church that carries out Jesus' mission of love and healing in the world today. The ministry provides quality, compassionate care to people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds with special attention to the poor, neglected and vulnerable.

Representing more than 600 hospitals and 1,200 long-term care and other health facilities in all 50 states, Catholic health care is the largest group of non-profit health care providers in the nation. Catholic hospitals care for one in six patients in America each year. In addition, millions of seniors, children and families are served annually in long-term care, assisted living, hospice and community health centers. To promote the health and well-being of communities, comprehensive community outreach programs serve pregnant women, babies, children, families, seniors, the poor and the uninsured.

As a vital ministry of the church, Catholic health care is “a response to the challenge of Jesus to go and do likewise.” Joined in a shared mission of healing, members of the ministry rejoice in the challenge to be Christ's healing compassion in the world and view their work not only as an effort to restore and preserve health but also as a...“sign of that final healing that will one day bring about the new creation...”

(Conclusion, *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*).

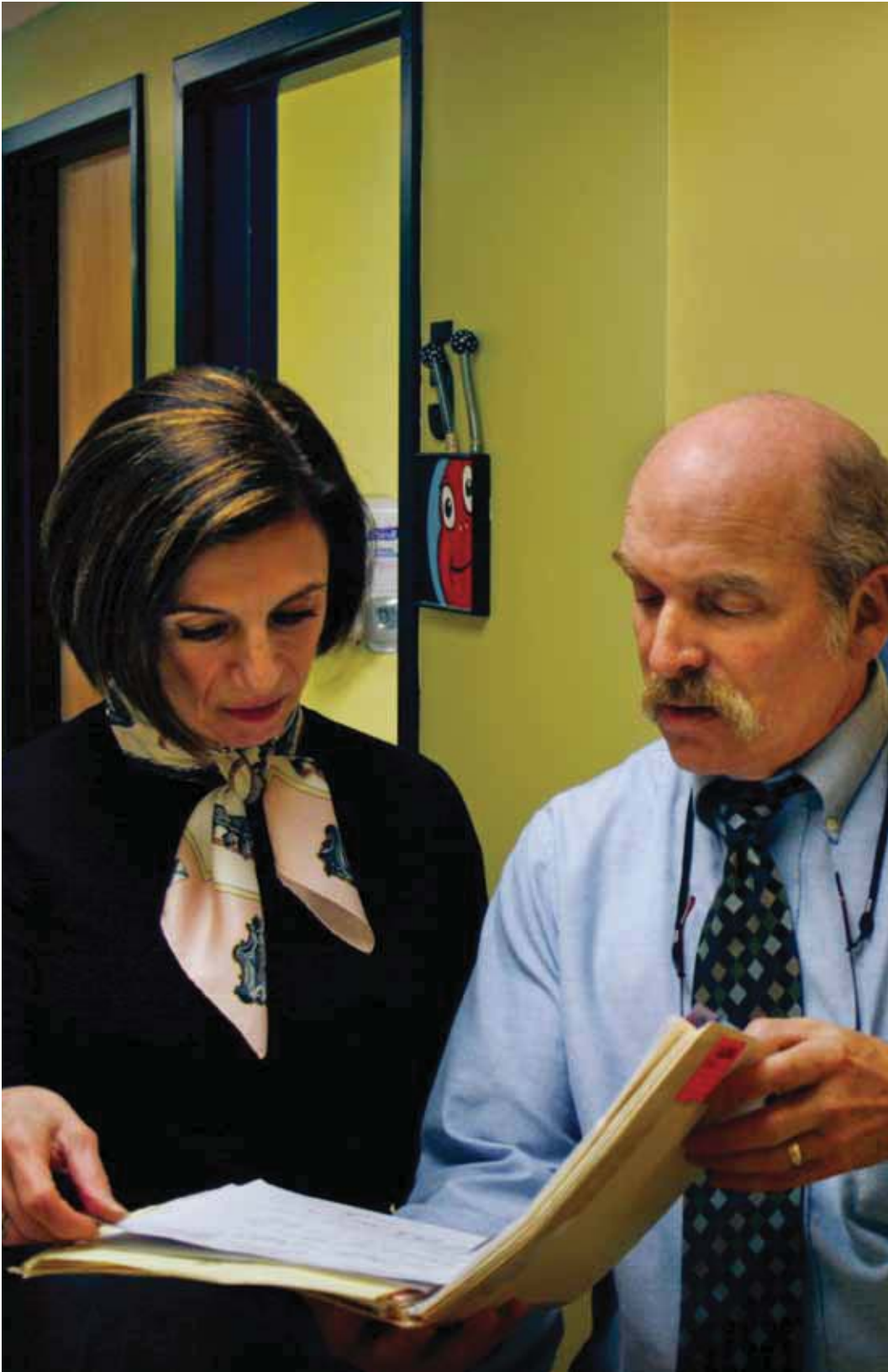


Catholic health care has a rich history in America. Founded by a small group of French Ursuline sisters in New Orleans, the first Catholic hospital in America opened in 1734. Soon, sisters from additional religious congregations arrived, starting hospitals and clinics in cities, towns, frontier outposts and rural communities across the country. Today, the community of Catholic health organizations continues the mission of their founding religious congregations together with

dedicated lay men and women who work in Catholic health care.

While women and men religious continue their sponsorship of and involvement in the ministry, lay persons, Catholic and non-Catholic, increasingly play important roles as well. By virtue of their baptism, and their participation and leadership in the ministry, these individuals assist the church in continuing Jesus' work of healing and compassion.





## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF AN ETHICIST?

Health care is complex and ever-changing. Technological breakthroughs and medical advances accelerate demand for expensive treatments that are not accessible to everyone. Market competition and reimbursement gaps strain finances and operations, even as Catholic health care remains committed to serving the needs of everyone, including the poor, vulnerable and uninsured.

At the same time, patients, families and providers frequently face difficult questions about appropriate care and treatment. Sponsors and executive leaders work to integrate ethical values throughout complex organizations and deal with sometimes thorny moral questions around business arrangements and partnerships.

These and other real-world situations raise important moral and ethical dilemmas, requiring in-depth knowledge and experience in bioethics, organizational ethics and moral theology.

This is where the ethicist comes in...to provide guidance, education, consultation and assistance in navigating the complex, and sometimes turbulent, waters of health care.

Ethicists facilitate discernment and provide guidance for making just and moral decisions when answers aren't always clear. They do this out of a love for helping people and with respect for the moral and ethical teachings of the Gospel and the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*.

Today, there are approximately 70 professional ethicists within Catholic health care. Some are in facilities, some in systems, and some bridge the two. Their responsibilities vary somewhat depending on their location, but their primary responsibilities include:

- + Ethics education for various audiences, including boards, senior leadership and clinical and non-clinical staff
- + Consultations, clinical and organizational
- + Guidance of ethics committees
- + Development of ethics-related resources and tools, especially on ethical issues of an organizational and ecclesial nature
- + Facilitation of ethical discernment
- + Leadership formation
- + Assistance in policy development
- + Position and advisory statements
- + Research
- + Publication in the area of health care ethics





## ON BEING AN ETHICIST...

In ethics, it is not simply what one knows, but who one is that ensures credibility, efficacy and endurance in the field. The ethicist must be knowledgeable, but if he or she is not also virtuous, they will do little to advance the ministry of the systems they purport to serve.

*SR. PATRICIA TALONE, RSM, PH.D., Vice President, Mission Services  
Catholic Health Association, St. Louis, Mo.*

Ethicists are architects, a different type of weaver if you will. Consultation, education, ethics policies, quality work, coaching, mentoring, presence –are the tools and materials of the ethics craft. With them the ethicist creates moral spaces that prompt and allow for conversations and interactions that stretch moral imagination. Interwoven into organizational life, they support the development of a community grounded in shared values and mutual support.

*KATE PAYNE, RN, JD, Director, Ethics  
St. Thomas Hospital, Nashville, Tenn.*

The ultimate role of an ethicist is to support the integration of the organization’s values and Catholic identity with the processes,practices and decisions through which the organization lives out its mission and vision, while protecting patient rights and promoting the best interests of the patient.

*JOHN PAUL SLOSAR, PH.D., Senior Director, Ethics  
Ascension Health, St. Louis, Mo.*





To be successful in the ethicist role, some very clear competencies are needed. Along with formal ethics education within the Catholic tradition, the ethicist must be comfortable with and capable of functioning within a hospital culture and setting, possess strong interpersonal skills, be perceived as a team player, and be viewed as a credible and professionally competent ethicist.

[BRIAN O'TOOLE, PH.D.](#), Senior Vice President, Mission and Ethics  
Sisters of Mercy Health System, St. Louis, Mo.

With a collegial, non-judgmental approach, an ethicist can be a sympathizer and cheerleader, negotiator and educator, patient advocate, listener and respectful questioner, and a reminder of common goals.

[SUSAN McCARTHY, MA](#), Clinical Ethics Director  
Ministry Health Care, Milwaukee, Wis.

Where there is always too much to do and too many voices demanding still better outcomes, the ethicist must help reveal the deep truth of Daniel Berrigan's adage: Don't just do something, stand there!

[JOHN W. GLASER, STD](#), Senior Vice President, Theology and Ethics  
St. Joseph of Orange Health System, Orange, Calif.

A photograph of a man in a white lab coat and a patterned bow tie, looking down at a patient in a hospital setting. The background is slightly blurred, showing a hallway with lights.

## WHAT QUALIFICATIONS DO I NEED TO BE AN ETHICIST IN CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE?

Although many qualifications are similar for ethicists who work in Catholic health care, there are a few differences between those who work at a facility level and those who work in large, integrated health systems.

### CLINICAL OR FACILITY ETHICIST

Individuals interested in a position as a clinical or facility ethicist should have at least an M.A., though a Ph.D. or the equivalent is preferred. Appropriate areas of specialization are health care ethics, theology, philosophy, medicine, law, nursing or some other health-related discipline. All candidates are expected to have a solid understanding of health care ethics and the Catholic moral tradition, including Catholic social teaching.

## SYSTEM ETHICIST

Individuals interested in a position as a system ethicist should have a Ph.D. or the equivalent in health care ethics, theology, philosophy, medicine, law, nursing or some other health-related discipline. Candidates without a degree in theology need to be able to demonstrate knowledge of Catholic theology and of the Catholic moral tradition. In addition, they should have experience in health care, preferably Catholic health care, and in the clinical setting.

While clinical ethicists and system ethicists have their own particular competencies, they do share several in common:

- + Knowledge of the Catholic moral tradition, including Catholic social teaching.
- + Knowledge of Catholic health care ethics, including organizational ethics and the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*.
- + The ability to teach and write clearly and effectively.
- + Good communication skills with diverse groups.
- + The capacity for critical thinking and creative problem solving.
- + The skills to contribute to the discipline of health care ethics through research and writing, and to develop educational programs and resources.

**Learn more about the desired qualifications and competencies for ethicists in Catholic health care at [www.chausa.org/ethics](http://www.chausa.org/ethics)**





## WHAT ARE SOME PATHS TO A CAREER IN ETHICS?

There are several ways to prepare for an ethics position in Catholic health care. Some individuals come to the health care ministry with an academic degree in theology or philosophy. Others come with a degree in health care ethics. For yet others, health care ethics is a second career. They come to the role with a background in medicine, nursing, law, social work, and the like, and supplement that with graduate work in theology, philosophy, or health care ethics.

In addition to academic programs across the country in theology and philosophy, there are also several programs in Catholic universities specifically devoted to health care ethics, offering either a master's degree and or a doctorate. Contact information for a sampling of programs appears below.

Albert Gnaegi Center for  
Health Care Ethics  
St. Louis University  
St. Louis, Mo.  
314 977-6661  
[www.hce.slu.edu](http://www.hce.slu.edu)

The Bioethics Institute  
Loyola Marymount University  
Los Angeles, Calif.  
310-338-2700  
[www.bellarmino.lmu.edu/bioethics.html](http://www.bellarmino.lmu.edu/bioethics.html)

Center for Health Care Ethics  
Duquesne University  
Pittsburgh, Pa.  
412-396-4504  
[www.chce@duq.edu](mailto:www.chce@duq.edu)

Center for Health Policy and Ethics  
Creighton University  
Omaha, Neb.  
402-280-2017  
[www.chpe@creighton.edu](mailto:www.chpe@creighton.edu)

Department of Theology and Philosophy  
Barry University  
Miami Shores, Fla.  
800-756-6000, ext. 3469  
[www.theology@mail.barry.edu](mailto:www.theology@mail.barry.edu)

Department of Philosophy  
Loyola University Chicago  
Chicago, Ill.  
773-508-2291  
[www.luc.edu/philosophy/ma\\_hce.shtml](http://www.luc.edu/philosophy/ma_hce.shtml)

Institute of Catholic Bioethics  
St. Joseph's University  
Philadelphia, Pa.  
610-660-3425  
[www.sju.edu/academics/centers/bioethics](http://www.sju.edu/academics/centers/bioethics)

Neiswanger Institute for Bioethics  
and Health Policy  
Loyola University Chicago Stritch  
School of Medicine  
Chicago, Ill.  
708-327-9200  
[bioethics@lumc.edu](mailto:bioethics@lumc.edu)

Theology Department  
Marquette University  
Milwaukee, Wis.  
414-288-7170  
[www.marquette.edu/theology/grad\\_requirements.shtml#PhDProgram](http://www.marquette.edu/theology/grad_requirements.shtml#PhDProgram)



## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF A CAREER IN ETHICS?

Serving as an ethicist in Catholic health care is a highly rewarding career, professionally and personally. Ethicists play a central role in strengthening the identity and integrity of the organizations to which they belong. They help shape the institutional culture, form those employed by the organization, facilitate discernment and guide deliberations. They provide support to patients, families, and care givers. In all of this they also advance the discipline of Catholic health care ethics, and much more. While making possible a good living, serving as an ethicist in Catholic health care enables an individual to pursue research and teaching interests in combination with the very real application of his or her knowledge and skills to the daily challenges of the world of health care.

TO LEARN MORE, VISIT [WWW.CHAUSA.ORG/ETHICS](http://WWW.CHAUSA.ORG/ETHICS)



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314.427.0029 *fax*

Washington DC Office

1875 Eye Street NW, Ste. 1000  
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202.296.3997 *fax*

[www.chausa.org](http://www.chausa.org)