

Catholic Nurses - Protect Your Conscience in the Workplace

A Word from the Committee on Ethics and Spirituality



Nursing



Ministry



Catholic Mission

There have been stories in the news lately of challenges to the right of Catholic health care professionals to practice according to their conscience, even to the point, as in the case of one physician assistant, of alleged termination from employment from a Catholic health care facility, as reported by the [Catholic News Agency](#) and the [National Catholic Register](#).

Catholic nurses need to be aware of these issues and arm themselves with the knowledge of what to do to prevent situations of conflict and to manage them if they arise.

The Committee on Ethics and Spirituality offers the following suggestions, whether working in Catholic or non-Catholic health care settings:

1. Know the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services ([ERDs](#)) and follow them.
2. Be proactive. Do not automatically assume that the ERDs and your conscientious objections will be honored.

3. Make clear in the job interview process that you are a Catholic nurse and that you follow the ERDs. Make sure there is an understanding that your conscience will be respected prior to accepting a job offer.
4. Know the employer policies in regard to the activities in which you are asked to participate and any conscience protections.
5. If you find yourself in a conflict situation, talk to your immediate supervisor.
6. If you find yourself in an unresolved conflict situation in Catholic health care, inform the local diocesan bishop of the problem.
7. Maintain HIPAA requirements as well as confidentiality in all communication and keep all relevant documentation.
8. If you believe that you have been discriminated against on the basis of your conscience or coerced to violate your conscience, file a complaint with your agency's Human Resources department and, if necessary, with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [Office for Civil Rights](#).
9. Ethicists at the [National Catholic Bioethics Center](#) may be available to offer bioethical advice.
10. Seek legal advice, if necessary, for example from [Alliance Defending Freedom](#), [Thomas More Society](#), or [Becket](#). NACN-USA gives no legal advice.

Under the patronage of Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception, the NACN-USA offers guidance, support and networking for Catholic nurses and nursing students and, most importantly, our prayers. As our chaplain, Father Michael Whyte, reminds us in the prayer below, Catholic nursing is a vocation, a healing ministry to which we are called by God and to which we commit ourselves for the greater honour and glory of God.

Prayer for Catholic Nurses & Nursing Students

Loving God, the source of all life and healing,
hear our prayers and petitions for all who are called
to the vocation of Catholic Nursing.

Lord, bless Your nurses, those who practice today and those who are preparing for this life renewing ministry, and prepare each day their hearts, minds and souls to the call of caring for and advocating for the sick. In this Catholic healing ministry, may they remember the example of perfect compassionate care which Christ Himself gave to those in need: providing for both the material and spiritual needs of the human person; grant to them Your gift to see the totality of humanity, both flesh and spirit.

Through the love of the Father and the Son, which is Your Holy Spirit, enable them to provide to heal the wounds of humanity which inflict both flesh and spirit through injury, disease and human choice. May they attend to the image and likeness of God, the soul that lives forever, which was given to each by God Himself.

Lord, instill in those You have called to be a Catholic nurse Your Holy Love. Grant to them the desire to always support, defend and strengthen human life through healing care, which fulfills the sacred oath of the healthcare professionals and commands them to "First Do No Harm." And remind them of the great tradition of Catholic nursing and caregiving begun by the Church centuries ago through the first hospitals and certain beliefs of true healthcare. That upon the shoulders of many men and women, they now stand and are called to continue the Catholic tradition to care for body, mind and soul. Today, more than ever, they are the sacred line of defense against a culture of death, a culture which sees little or no value in human suffering.

Lord, as the men and women of Catholic nursing prepare to continue Your healing ministry, may they become the true instrument of Jesus Christ's compassionate care so that they may faithfully heal and preserve the vessel in which Christ has placed His Image and Likeness for our earthly journey toward Him.

We ask these and all our prayers in the Holy Name of Jesus Christ.
Amen!

Prayer authored by Fr. Whyte, NACN-USA Chaplain

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid ([John 14: 27](#)).