



*To My Brother Bishops
taking part in the Twenty-fourth Bishops' Workshop
organized by the National Catholic Bioethics Center*

Once again I send cordial greetings as you gather in Dallas for these days of study and reflection on the complex ethical issues associated with developments in medicine and the life sciences. I am grateful to the National Catholic Bioethics Center for organizing this biennial conference and to the Knights of Columbus for their unfailing financial support and assistance.

The theme of this year's Workshop – *Bioethics Through the Eyes of Faith: Serving Christ in the Sick and Vulnerable* – is most fitting in the light of the Church's celebration of the Year of Faith, which commemorates the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. The Council's summons to a renewal of ecclesial life and evangelical witness remains as urgent as ever, especially in the light of the sweeping cultural changes which have affected every aspect of our societies. This is especially the case in the rapidly-developing areas of medical research, clinical practice and bioethics. The Church's age-old engagement in the areas of health care, teaching, research and ethical reflection continues today in changed circumstances, yet with constant concern for what remains essential: fidelity to the Gospel and the light of the natural moral law, and commitment to honoring the God-given dignity and worth of every human being at every stage of life.

This commitment is evident above all in the dedication with which so many of the faithful have devoted their lives to the care of those who are

lonely, marginalized or excluded, seeing them as “those who are the first with a claim on our attention and the most important for us to support, because it is in them that the reflection of Christ’s own face is seen” (*Porta Fidei*, 14). Through their witness, we realize that the Church’s service of charity is an expression of her very being, and not a means to some other institutional end or simply another form of organized social assistance. For this reason it is essential that the Church always and everywhere enjoy the freedom to carry out this service in accord with ethical principles through her charitable and health care institutions, including her hospitals, nursing homes, orphanages, schools, colleges and universities, to say nothing of the programs of social assistance sponsored by the national network of Catholic Charities.

Fidelity to the Gospel, concern for the sick and vulnerable, and conscientious service to the common good have always been hallmarks of the Church’s service of charity in your country. The responsibility of carrying on this proud legacy at the beginning of the third millennium calls for wisdom and courage on the part of all, especially when this involves resisting efforts from various quarters to force our institutions to act in a way contrary to the moral law. As I observed at the beginning of my meetings with the American bishops during their visits *ad limina Apostolorum*, many people of good will, whatever their religious or political views, continue to look to the Church for insight and sound guidance in facing the complex moral issues which will shape the future of society. Consequently, “the present moment can be seen in positive terms as a summons to exercise the prophetic dimension of your episcopal ministry by speaking out, humbly yet insistently, in defense of moral

truth, and offering a word of hope, capable of opening hearts and minds to the truth that sets us free” (*Address to Bishops of Regions I-II-III*, 26 November 2011).

Dear brother bishops, it is my prayer that these days of reflection and study will confirm you in your commitment to proclaiming and defending the moral imperatives of the Gospel. In this Year of Faith, which invites all Christ’s followers to make the truth and beauty of the faith shine out for the men and women of our time, may you and those with whom you cooperate in advancing the Church’s mission be strengthened in witness to the dignity and inviolable rights of each human person, and in commitment to the growth of the civilization of love. With these sentiments, I commend you, and all taking part in the present Workshop, to the loving intercession of Mary Immaculate, and cordially impart my Apostolic Blessing as a pledge of grace and peace in the Lord.

From the Vatican, 25 January 2013

Benedictus PP. XVI