



SaskEthics

An Ethics Newsletter for Catholic Healthcare Organizations in Saskatchewan

Crucifixes provide a powerful reminder

Dear *SaskEthics* Readers,



Have you ever found yourself wondering why there is a crucifix in every room in Catholic hospitals and care

homes? The crucifix (a cross with the body of Jesus on it) is so emblematic of Catholicism that it might be tempting to think that they are displayed everywhere as part of a branding strategy. However, the crucifix is so much more than that.

The crucifix is a reminder that suffering and death are not in control. That may seem strange, especially as most often the body of Jesus is displayed hanging limply on the wood of the cross. This image of our dying God leads us to the deeper realization that what we see with our eyes is not really what is going at all. In a moment when Jesus appears to be completely powerless, He is actually winning the ultimate victory over death.

With the crucifix as a symbol of this victory, faith-based healthcare continues to operate out of the belief that the suffering we witness on a daily basis hides

a deeper reality, and it is our mission to reveal this deeper reality.

A person's body may be doubled over, but they are not powerless. A person's face may bear the creases of sleepless nights, but they remain beautiful. A person may be cranky and grumpy, but they are still beloved.

Consider, for example, a patient who has just been diagnosed with a terminal illness. The news has hit him hard, and during the night he whispers to his nurse, "I don't want to be a burden on my family."

As healthcare providers, there are two paths we can go down when caring for such a patient. We can confirm his fear: yes, you are burden. Or we can do something more. We can look deeper, past the physical reality he is experiencing and affirm that even though his body is breaking, he is still valuable. He is still dignified and it is an honour to care for him.

How we do this is perhaps a more challenging question. As I have watched our amazing teams, I have had the privilege of witnessing many different ways that they affirm the dignity of their



patients. Sometimes it is by engaging them in conversation during care. Other times it is by allowing themselves to be cared for by the patient by sharing pieces of their own stories. Often it is by simply saying “thank you.”

Whether or not you practice the Catholic faith, the next time you pass a crucifix in a Catholic facility I hope you will pause for

a moment to ask yourself: what is it that I am not seeing in my patient today? Do I recognize their beauty? How have I reflected back to them that it is an honour to provide their care?

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New End-of-Life Conversations Guide Now Available!

For the complete guide and access to
the Bishops of Saskatchewan March 2025 Pastoral Letter, visit

<https://www.stpaulshospital.org/news/end-of-life-conversations-guide-offers-support>

End-of-Life Conversations
A Guide for
Emmanuel Health Staff

Have you ever heard any of these phrases?

- “I want this to end.”
- “I wish I didn’t have to be here anymore.”
- “Why won’t God take me?”
- “What can you tell me about Medical Assistance in Dying (MAiD)?”

Behind each of these phrases is a plea for recognition, listening, and support.

The experiences of pain and suffering, dependence on others, or being away from home cause many people to reflect on their lives. This can lead to a search for meaning and to questions about what dying will look like. In Catholic health care, we remain committed to providing opportunities for people to explore their questions and to consider what living through their dying could look like.

This guide presents three alternative responses to moments in which patients, residents, and clients invite us to contemplate their end-of-life care with them.

All three alternatives are appropriate ways to accompany the people in our care. Which response you engage will depend on many factors including your profession, your role on your team, your personal values, and the other tasks you need to fulfill in a particular moment. As you discern which approach would be most appropriate for you, consider reaching out to your supervisor, colleagues, and others to reflect on your context.

Recognize
Listen
Support

The following three scenarios are provided to help you discern how best to accompany the people in your care.