

**International Conference “Palliative Care. An International Laboratory”**

**February 9-11, 2022 - PAV/Zoom**

**President’s Greeting: Most Reverend Vincenzo Paglia**

**Wednesday, February 9, 15.00-15.10**

**With this greeting, I am pleased to welcome all of you who are participating, whether in person or online, in this International Conference sponsored by the Pontifical Academy for Life: “Palliative Care. An International Laboratory.” Our work starts today and will continue tomorrow and Friday, February tenth and eleventh. I offer the Academy’s special thanks to Professor Christoph Ostfath, President of the European Association of Palliative Care, an organization that is a leader not only in Europe but also around the world with respect to the scientific aspects of palliative care, as well as in effective clinical practice, and that has always devoted special attention to the ethical and spiritual dimensions of care for the dying and for all who are gravely ill, as well as their families. Having Professor Ostfath with us in Rome will certainly make the work of our Conference more fruitful and will be of great benefit to the Pontifical Academy for Life. Indeed, our Academy, which is a Holy See entity, has been concentrating for several years on end-of-life ethical issues specifically with a view to the promotion and wide acceptance of palliative care around the world.**

**In palliative care we have a valid scientific, ethical, and cultural model for the accompaniment of those who have reached the end of their earthly journey. The palliative care movement is not only an understanding way to be close to those who suffer, it also sends a message about how to understand human existence. It offers a very specific way of living together that focuses on the person and his good, which is the goal not only of the individual but of all society. Palliative care is truly a right, and we can be pleased that awareness of this right is growing little by little, but at the heart of this right is a recognition that each of us is part of the community, a member of our coexisting humanity. This vision has produced new thinking in medicine that has led to a rediscovery of medicine’s true vocation which is “caring.” We all know that “healing” is the principal concern of medicine today, but we must avoid believing that it is the “only goal, cost what it costs.” Rather, we must remember that there are limits to our existence that cannot be overcome. The illusion for earthly immortality, which is what leads to believing that a “cure” at any cost is the goal, is misleading. Recognition of our radical human finitude lets us reject obstinate continuation of treatments that inflict useless suffering or even result in further harm.**

Pope Francis recalled this idea this morning at the general audience, stating that: "we cannot avoid death and, precisely for this reason, after having done all that is humanly possible to cure the sick person, therapeutic overkill is immoral". Reducing or suspending treatments that are no longer proportionate is not the same as abandoning a patient. Even when nothing can be done to cure a patient, it is not true that "doing nothing" is acceptable. The patient must be accompanied with love, with relief of pain, with support as he or she grows weaker, respecting and maintaining the patient's dignity, and rejecting alternatives that destroy that dignity such as assisted suicide or euthanasia.

We must be careful," the Pope said today, "not to confuse this help with unacceptable drifts that lead to killing. We must accompany to death, but not provoke death or help any form of suicide".

Allowing for "death on demand" means surrendering to a philosophy of abandonment and exclusion. Instead, we must provide for appropriate accompaniment in the face of negative physical developments and the inevitable questions about the meaning of suffering. This includes not only the patient but also his or her family and caregivers.

By launching the PAL-LIFE Project in 2017, the Pontifical Academy for Life committed itself to serious consideration of the human and social challenges that a patient's fragility and advanced illness present to all of us today. In this task, the Academy has become a scientific and cultural partner for the palliative care medical community, which is deeply committed to its task with professional skill and compassion. In 2018, as part of its PAL-LIFE Project, the Academy sponsored an important International Conference which resulted in the publication, in several languages, of the *White Book for Palliative Care*, which was addressed to all stakeholders having a role in the development of palliative care. In more recent years, numerous other international study initiatives have been conducted in India, the United States, Latin America, Qatar and several European countries, and others are being organized.

The Covid pandemic may have diverted attention from this and other issues, but our duty is to continue on the path leading to the accompaniment of all those who need palliative care, including Covid patients. These last have not always been provided with the palliative care they need. We are aware that, despite a positive trend in the acceptance palliative care around the world, there are still many barriers that hinder access to such care or limit its quality.

Encouraged by the international community, we have decided to follow up on the work begun in 2017. We will study different strategies and models in order to overcome the difficulties that prevent palliative care from reaching the patients who need it, and in order to lend support to families, all within the framework of existing and proposed laws and theoretical models. The barriers and obstacles to

the delivery of palliative care are likely to be similar across national boundaries. Thus, the example of Italy can be a useful laboratory within an international perspective. Countries that are more successful can offer models and strategies that countries that are just beginning can use to their advantage.

In this context, I suggest that the watchwords of our Conference should be:

- **CONCRETENESS:** we must strive to find solutions that actually work; and
- **RESPONSIBILITY:** we must offer proposals that respect the dignity of the people we serve.

In this work I have been assisted by very well qualified experts. Some are members of the Academy, others are not, but all have scientific distinction and ethical credibility. I would like to thank the following persons in particular: Professor Carlos Centeno, Professor of Palliative Care at the University of Navarra in Spain; Doctor Gian Lorenzo Scaccabarozzi, President of the Palliative Care and Pain Therapy Section of the Technical Scientific Committee of the Italian Ministry of Health; Doctor Maria Donata Bellentani, of the Health Planning Directorate in the Italian Ministry of Health, Doctor Adriana Turriziani, former Director of the Villa Speranza Hospice of the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart of Rome and Past President of the Italian Society of Palliative Care.

Let me conclude this greeting with the words of Pope Francis, certain that, prophetically, they were also meant for you as participants in this International Conference: "I appreciate [...] your scientific and cultural commitment to ensuring that palliative care can reach all those who need it. [...] this type of assistance has no less value for the fact that it 'does not save lives.' Palliative care accomplishes something equally as important as the saving of lives—it values the person. I urge all those who, in various capacities, are engaged in palliative care, to fulfill your commitment while maintaining a spirit of service and remembering that medical knowledge can be called true science, in its noblest meaning, only if it works for the good of humanity, a good that is never opposed to life and human dignity."

This is the humanistic root that animates all our work. I am sure that we will work together effectively and learn much from each other. I wish each of you a very profitable three days together.