

GENERAL BIOETHICS COMMISSION
THE HOSPITALLER ORDER OF ST JOHN OF GOD

I. RATIONALE AND PURPOSE

Ethics is a discipline whose many different facets are acquiring increasing prominence in the contemporary world. In every area of society there is a clamour for ethics, in business and politics, as well as in ecology, research, education and welfare and health care. The demand comes from governments, international organisations, professional associations, universities and religious denominations, and in particular from the Catholic Church.

This is all the result of the huge technical and scientific, social and political progress now being made, as well as the new development possibilities that are opening up to the contemporary world. These advances are of great value, because they are of benefit to human life, yet at the same time they are confronting individuals and societies with serious moral dilemmas to because they sometimes harm the dignity of individuals, dehumanise life and relations between human beings, foster inequalities, and ignore the environment.

Particular importance today is attributed to the ethics of life. Bioethics is the discipline that studies the ethical dilemmas of human life. These are arising increasingly in every sphere, driven by the increasing protagonism of people taking decisions that affect health, and by the progress made in medical science which is now making it possible to intervene in human life from the beginning to its natural end in various different ways.

The Hospitaller Order of St John of God is particularly sensitive and committed to Bioethics, in order to appropriately reflect and address the ethical dilemmas that are emerging in the life of each and every Centre of the Order, in relation to welfare and health care, as well as management and social and biomedical research. The Order has been encouraging the establishment of Bioethics Committees on several years now, some of them already with a great deal of experience to their credit. In 2000, the Order published the Charter of Hospitality which laid down the basic principles and guidelines for action in the field of bioethics within our Order.

At the LXVI General Chapter held in October 2006 in Rome, the Hospitaller Order considered it necessary to continue driving Bioethics, with greater commitment if possible, in all the Centres, conscious of its importance, and the need to provide formation for Brothers and Co-Workers in this matter in order to be able to properly address the ethical issues that arise with increasing frequency and ever-greater complexity. This is why General Chapter approved the establishment of a General Bioethics Commission (GBC) to promote the ethical sensitivity of our Brothers and Co-Workers, mainly through formation, setting up new Bioethics Committees and providing counselling and coordination at the general level on all bioethical issues. More specifically, the determination of Chapter, which constitutes the mission and the fundamental objective of the GBC is the following:

“At the General Curia a liaison, consultation or monitoring body should be established to be able to reflect at the level of the whole Order, to provide advice to the Provinces, and to gather information on everything that is being done on the Ethics and/or Bioethics

Committees in the Order; this information should be shared with the largest possible number of people, particularly with those who do not have a committee of this kind and have to address similar problems.” (Declarations, LXVI General Chapter, Bioethics, 2)

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church, the principles and the fundamental features of the Order's Charter of Hospitality, the real-life situation of all the people affected and interdisciplinary ethical dialogue (theological/moral, healthcare sciences, behavioural sciences, legislation and law, users and others) must form the basic framework for the development and work of the GBC in particular, and Bioethics in the life of the Order in general.

II OBJECTIVES AND FUNCTIONS

The purpose of the GBC is essentially to provide advice and direction on Bioethical issues, to promote and coordinate Bioethics Committees, to foster ethical formation and sensitivity in our care Centres and propose guidelines for action, particularly in situations where there is greatest conflict within the Order. In particular, we note the following objectives and functions:

1. To promote the establishment of Bioethics Committees in the Order at the Provincial level or within the Apostolic Centres.
2. To foster ethical and bioethical formation for Brothers and Co-Workers throughout the whole Order.
3. To encourage reflection and study of ethical issues in the fields of health care, management and research as a means of developing and expanding the Charter of Hospitality, to be used to direct and guide the Order.
4. To find out how existing Bioethics Committees operate within the Order and the reflections, protocols and fundamental guidelines for action that exist, in order to correctly coordinate them all and promote an exchange of information between the Order's Provinces and Centres.
5. To provide consultancy services and submit reports on Bioethical issues to the Central Government of the Order.
6. To provide consultancy services and direct Provinces and Centres on bioethics issues, particularly when controversial ethical situations and dilemmas arise.
7. To facilitate access by the Provinces to the GBC through the Head of the Commission and the General Councillors responsible for the Regions of the Order.
8. To provide opportunities for establishing relations with Foundations, Institutes, Units and Biomedical Research Centres in the Order, and particularly with their Ethics Committees, and in order to become familiar with, coordinate and appraise ethical criteria for action.

9. To attend Bioethics congresses and meetings organised in the Order, bringing its vision and opinions on the issues dealt with there.

10. To publish a Bioethics Newsletter for the whole Order to be used as a channel of communication on ethical issues for the whole Order (dealt with below).

11. To study the possibility of becoming members of and participating in International Bioethics Committees (UNESCO, WHO etc).

III. COMPOSITION

Bro. Jesús Etayo, General Councillor (Head)

Bro. Elia Tripaldi, General Councillor

A Bioethics expert, Fr Francesc Abel, President of the Instituto Borja de Bioética (Barcelona)

An Italian Bioethics expert, Dr Salvino Leone. Rome Province.

A representative of Germany/Austria. Dr Thomas Binsack (Munich). Specialist in Palliative Care.

A representative of Ireland/England, Sr Anna Plunkett (Ireland). Specialist in intellectual impairment.

A representative of America, Dr Ricardo Emilio Salazar Arias (Bogotá). A physician with various specialisms, and Master in Bioethics.

A representative of Africa: the specific problems of Africa. Bro. André Senné (Senegal)

A representative of the Asia-Pacific region: Bro. John Conway, a nurse, specialising in mental health (Korea)

An expert in law and legislation. Dra. Maria Teresa Iannone. Isola Tiberina Hospital

The Secretary of the Commission: Bro. Gian Carlo Lopic

Since the Commission will be based in Rome, the possibility of having a representative of the Church, who is an expert on bioethics, as a member of International Institutions (WHO, UNESCO etc) will be examined.

When specific issues arise it might be possible to invite other experts in specific areas to attend meetings of the GBC.

IV. OPERATION AND METHODOLOGY

· The GBC will normally meet once a year, at the General Curia in Rome.

- Extraordinary meetings can also be convened when it is deemed appropriate and necessary to do so, in view of particular consultations and issues that may arise during the year. The Commission Head, acting as a Standing Committee, will convene a few members of the GBC, normally chosen from those living closest to Rome.
- When this is done, and to address other aspects and issues falling within the scope of the Commission, the Permanent Secretariat will contact all the members of the Commission by e-mail in order to gather their opinions and the views of all the members, and to address any other issues deemed necessary.
- The working method will be deliberative, based on an interdisciplinary dialogue and debate, seeking to reach a consensus in the deliberations as far as possible, but always consistently with the fundamental values and principles of the Order.
- The GBC will have a Permanent Secretariat at the General Curia, which will receive, reply and archive all the documentation submitted by the Provinces. It will also produce the agenda for the meetings, which will be convened with at least 70 days' prior notice, publish the proceedings of the meetings, and report on any consultations.
- Working committees can be established with other individuals to draft reflections, documents, protocols etc, coordinated by two members of the GBC. They shall submit the results of their work to the GCB for it to study and finally adopt them.
- Through the Secretariat, the Commission shall provide information on any Congresses and Meetings on Bioethics organised in the Order, and any others organised outside our Institution. A member of the GCB shall be sent to attend these Congresses and Meetings.
- The Order will establish its own ethical and bioethical database in order to take stock of the bioethics situation within the Order, and will share the database with everyone: reflections, protocols, guidelines for action, case studies and decisions, etc.

Bro. Jesús Etayo
Rome, 30 December 2006