Most of the Catholic health care organizations across Canada were established by women religious in the Catholic/Christian tradition. In recent years, these women religious have transferred the ownership of these organizations to lay persons. As a result, the work is carried out by a variety of people – men and women of many different faiths and beliefs. This reality is reflective of Catholic health care today as we continue to live out those Christian values that make our work even more meaningful in today’s society. The purpose of this document is to clearly articulate for the leadership of these Catholic organizations the “essentials” that make Catholic health care what it is.

1. Catholic health care: a long tradition of responding to unmet needs

Catholic Health Care, for the most part, was established by women religious in Manitoba. The Grey Nuns and the Sisters of St. Benedict were particularly instrumental in establishing the health care organizations that are part of the Catholic Health Network today.

Many of the orphanages, homes for the sick and the elderly, hospices and other centers for health and social services that either existed in the past or that we presently find in Manitoba were founded by these women religious. Their ultimate goal was to serve humankind by responding to the unmet needs in our society and, through their ministry of compassion, to “manifest God’s love” to the people they served. They were intent in bringing new life, meaning and hope to communities, families and individuals throughout Manitoba.

Catholic Health Care organizations in Manitoba continue the work started by these women religious by “being present to people at the critical points where life can be fostered, where people are born and die, where they learn and are taught, where they are cured and healed, and where they are assisted when in trouble.” (CHAC Health Ethics Guide)

1 « women religious » refers to the women belonging to religious orders in the Catholic Church.
2. Catholic Health Care: respect for the dignity of every person

- Essentially Catholic health care is part of a community of service that provides health care to any one who needs it. **Catholic health care has a commitment to respond to the needs of the entire community** and, in particular, the hungry, the homeless, depressed, troubled, frail, sick, physically and mentally challenged – **regardless of gender, beliefs/faiths or culture**.

- Catholic Health Care is a service to all people: we are called to play a leadership role in shaping health care and services that respect human life and enhance human dignity.

- “Catholic health care should distinguish itself by service to and advocacy for those people whose social conditions puts them at the margins of our society and makes them particularly vulnerable to discrimination: the poor, children and the unborn; single parents; the elderly; those with incurable diseases and chemical dependencies; racial minorities; immigrants and refugees. In particular, the person with mental or physical disabilities, regardless of the cause or severity must be treated as a unique person of incomparable worth, with the same right to life and to adequate health care as all other persons.”
  (Ketteler, Catholic Conference of Kentucky, January 2007)

- Human life is sacred and inviolable\(^2\) in all of its phases and in every situation (CHAC Health Ethics Guide, 2000).

- We are open to and desire to be inclusive of all other faith groups and beliefs.

\(^2\) “inviolable” : secure from violation or profanation.
3. **Catholic Health Care: a ministry of care and compassion**

The main focus of the Catholic / Christian Church is to reflect God’s love by building a more humane and compassionate world.

- The **Christian Tradition** which is based on the Gospels emphasizes the individual and collective responsibility to care for those in need. **Followers of Jesus are told that they must be attentive to the needs of the poor, the marginalized and the sick.** (Matthew 25)

- In the Old Testament there is a similar attention given to those who cannot care for themselves. “In the Jewish Scriptures, at the heart of the biblical concept of justice was the care of the widow, orphan, and stranger. Responding to their needs was a special responsibility of the Jewish people, and this justice was the gauge of whether they understood their relationship to God and to one another”. (Fred Kammer, Catholic Charities USA, 1998, 2003)

- The **Gospel values of love and compassion towards all people** continue to guide our actions and decisions in Catholic Health Care.
  - To bring comfort to people by giving them an experience that will strengthen their confidence in life
  - To give those who are ill or suffering a reason to hope
  - To act on our belief in the presence of God in the human experience

4. **Catholic Health Care: a “holistic” approach to wellness**

- We form a community in which healing and compassion are evident. The care we offer is not limited to the treatment of a disease or bodily ailment but it embraces the physical, psychosocial and spiritual dimensions of the human person.
- We actively support and attend to the spiritual growth of those in our care. This is done without imposing specific religious beliefs upon either the care providers or those receiving our services.
• When attending to the needs of those we serve we are guided by the principle that those most affected will be involved in the decisions that are made about their health.
• Our organizations have spiritual care services with qualified staff and when possible a suitable space for prayer or reflection.

5. Catholic Health Care: working with others to improve the health of our communities.

• We demonstrate a willingness and a responsibility to work in partnership with others: public and private sectors, the voluntary, religious and non-profit sectors, other religions and other people of good will to serve community needs and to deliver care and services;
• We work with all Manitobans and regional health care providers building coalitions to address emerging community needs.

6. Catholic Health Care: Promoting justice and the common good

• Our vision of a more just and humane society and our concern for health requires that we advocate for the attainment of social and living conditions that allow people to grow towards full physical, psychological, mental and spiritual maturity.
• We promote the well-being of the community and the building of a just and compassionate social order which allows human growth for all individuals.
• We advocate for those in need
• Our commitment to social justice reflects a special concern for the poorest, the most fragile and the most vulnerable members of society.

7. Catholic Health Care: Stewardship and creativity

• We share a responsibility to respect, protect and care for all creation and for ourselves.
• We demonstrate stewardship over all material by refraining from the abuse or the squandering of nature’s resources.
• We act creatively with the intention of contributing to God’s world with humility and kindness.

8. Catholic Health Care: sound ethical reflection that leads to informed decision-making.

• The ETHICAL guidelines of the Church as presented in the CHAC Health Ethics Guide help us to define the manner by which our decisions are made in respect of the Christian values that sustain our work in health care.
• The availability of an ethics committee and a process for ethical consultation to assist by advising on particular ethical situations is strongly encouraged in all our organizations.
• The Catholic Health Network Ethics Services\(^3\) offers assistance and consultation on ethical issues.

GENERAL NOTES RE: the Catholic Health Corporation of Manitoba.

1. A legal status within the Church.
The Catholic Health Corporation of Manitoba is a faith based organization within the Catholic tradition and is set up as a legal Church entity (public juridic person of pontifical right) reporting its activities directly to the Vatican on a yearly basis.

2. Visual affirmation of our identity as a Catholic organization: the display of Christian symbols in appropriate places (art work, crucifix etc.) is important to illustrate our identity as a Christian/Catholic organization.

3. The importance of having a proper context and environment (chapel, prayer rooms etc.) within which to offer worship and prayer opportunities.

\(^3\) The Catholic Health Network’s Ethics Services are situated at St. Boniface General Hospital.
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