



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP
DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

October 28, 2019
Feast of Saints Simon and Jude

Dear Brothers in Christ:

On October 2, the Feast of the Guardian Angels, **Catholic Medical Center** and its system **GraniteOne Health**, and **Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health** announced the ratification and signing of a Final Agreement regarding the combination of the two health systems. The signing of this Agreement marks an important moment in Catholic healthcare in New Hampshire, and so, in the event that you or your parishioners have questions, here are some aspects of the document that are of special significance for Catholics.

1. The guidelines issued by the **Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: *Some Principles for Collaboration between Catholic and Non-Catholic Entities***, issued in the year 2014, and the most recent *Sixth Edition of the Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services* (the *ERDs*) of the **United States Conference for Catholic Bishops**, make it quite clear that Catholic hospitals are permitted to combine with non-Catholic hospitals.

Such combinations can:

- Help to ensure the long-term strength of the Catholic mission in healthcare;
- Provide improvements in care for people served by the new system;
- Expose non-Catholic healthcare providers to Catholic approaches to healthcare; and
- Provide an opportunity for prophetic witness and education through, as Pope Benedict XVI once said, “the attractive alternative” presented by our faith and doctrine.

There is no question that a combination is permissible, as long as the combination is done correctly and attentive, vigilant oversight of the fidelity to the Catholic entities’ authentic Catholic identity is effectively maintained.

2. After extensive reviews of the Agreement, in consultation with canon and civil lawyers and professionals in the field of healthcare and Catholic doctrine, a comprehensive moral analysis was performed by the **National Catholic Bioethics Center** (NCBC), a leading consortium of trusted experts on Catholic morals and ethics. It should be noted that the NCBC was consulted throughout the process. The NCBC concluded that the Agreement is morally sound based upon the CDF guidelines and the ERDs, among other considerations.
3. Having completed all of these necessary components of due diligence in the matter, I determined that the Agreement is, in fact, morally appropriate from a Catholic perspective and so provided the decree of *nihil obstat* which I issued in late September 2019. The *nihil obstat* is the necessary prerequisite for CMC to proceed to ratify the Agreement.
4. You may read the entire text of the Agreement by visiting ForAHealthierNH.org.

5. The full document is over one hundred pages and, though lengthy, one must note several vital points, among many:
 - a. CMC will retain its Catholic identity, its assets, and its name;
 - b. The Roman Catholic Bishop of Manchester will retain oversight and authority with respect to the Catholic identity of CMC. The Bishop's powers in this regard will remain unchanged from what they are now;
 - c. Notably, this ongoing authority is addressed through the use of reserved powers laid out in the Agreement, so the Bishop's authority is beyond the power of the new system board to change;
 - d. CMC's assets can never be used to fund practices contrary to Catholic teaching;
 - e. No abortion, in vitro fertilization, sterilization, assisted suicide, or any other practice contrary to Catholic moral teaching will be permitted by CMC or its Catholic subsidiaries, and the new system will not have the power to force such practices on the Catholic organizations in the system;
 - f. No Catholic entity or employee will be allowed to, or be required to refer patients for any practices contrary to Catholic moral teaching;
 - g. The telephone number of CMC's Office of Catholic Identity will be posted in Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health facilities;
 - h. CMC patients who are referred for ethically-sound purposes to other providers in the new system will be provided with the contact information for the CMC Office of Catholic Identity in case they have questions or concerns about any moral issue that might arise; and
 - i. As is the case today, Dartmouth-Hitchcock physicians who are working at CMC will be trained in the ERDs and will comply with the ERDs at all times.

If you have the opportunity to read the Agreement itself, I think you will appreciate the vivid and robust protections for CMC's Catholic Identity that are built into the document. I commend Joseph Pepe, M.D. as the CEO of Catholic Medical Center and his staff for the work they have done to extend into perpetuity CMC's already very strong Catholic identity.

If you have any questions about the Agreement, I encourage you to contact Derek McDonald, my Delegate for Catholic Health Care, at 663-0171 or at dmcdonald@rcbm.org.

Grateful for your continued service to Our Lord and our people, I remain through the intercession of Our Lady, Health of the Sick and Saints Cosmas and Damian the charitable healers of antiquity (mentioned in the Roman Canon Eucharistic Prayer I), I remain

Faithfully yours in Christ,



Most Reverend Peter A. Libasci
Bishop of Manchester