

COLLABORATION AND ENCOUNTER

BY COLLEEN MCCORMICK, BSN, CRNA, MA BIOETHICS

With certainty, every two years marks the onset of a new legislative session in the small New England states of Vermont and New Hampshire. With equal regularity, legislation will be introduced proposing to adopt the practice of physician-assisted suicide, under the guise of some benevolent title such as “The Death with Dignity Act.” Each session the proponents of physician-assisted suicide (PAS) return, their arguments perhaps a little more honed than before. The 2009-2010 legislative sessions followed the established pattern.

In response, something new transpired this year in New Hampshire. It began with a collaborative effort, spearheaded by the Cabrini Institute, with support and guidance from The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity (CBHD) and the Tennessee Center for Bioethics and Culture. This collaboration, with the purpose of engaging the culture at large on bioethical issues, may prove a useful prototype for others in their locale.

Cabrini Institute, Inc. was founded in 2009 to promote ethical healthcare policy and practices. Co-founders and co-directors, Colleen McCormick, MA (Trinity Graduate School '05) and James Hageman, MA (Eastern Illinois University '76) envisioned that one of the means of meeting that objective is educational outreach within the professions and also community-wide. The mission is to broaden the base of citizens who become informed and involved in the debate.

The first annual Fall Foliage Dinner Discussion was established as one means to that end. Held at the Radisson Hotel Ballroom on October 9, 2009 in downtown Manchester, New Hampshire, the evening featured D. Joy Riley, MD, MA (Trinity Graduate School '04), executive director of the Tennessee Center for Bioethics and Culture as keynote speaker. Dr.

Riley presented an insightful discussion surrounding those fears many people hold in common regarding death. She expounded the ways that proponents of physician-assisted suicide propose to address those commonly held fears by means of that practice, and then unveiled the flawed thinking and results that follow from the “termination” approach. Her timely presentation was warmly received.

Following the presentation, a panel composed of Dr. Riley, former New Hampshire state senator Tom Colantuono,

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Esq., and Ms. McCormick undertook the topic: “Regulation of Medical Practice: the role of the legislature vs. the role of the professional medical society.” Attendees were present from Vermont and New Hampshire, the medical and legal/legislative professions, and a number of interested lay citizens. The presenters were particularly encouraged to see attendees from the New Hampshire House Judiciary Committee, since the New Hampshire PAS Bill had been remanded to the House Judiciary Committee for evaluation and disposition.

That New Hampshire House Bill was defeated one month later. On November 10, 2009 a vote in the Judiciary Committee brought the debate to a close for the current legislative session in New Hampshire. The defeat was achieved with a vote of 14 to 3. The leadership at Cabrini Institute believes the Fall Foliage Dinner Discussion was helpful if not

instrumental in this outcome. Given that similar legislation is pending in Vermont, Cabrini Institute, Inc. is considering a similar presentation to increase awareness and galvanize the citizens of Vermont.

What was accomplished in New Hampshire this October could not have been done apart from the collaborative efforts of Cabrini Institute, Inc., the Tennessee Center for Bioethics and Culture, and The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity. Jennifer McVey, the event and education manager at CBHD, offered critical guidance regarding both logistics and scope of the event, while the broader CBHD leadership offered strategic advice regarding the focus and content of the evening. Through CBHD's direct financial co-sponsorship, Cabrini Institute was able to provide scholarships for select individuals to attend the event free of charge. Moving forward, in future efforts to engage the culture, the author contends it will be critical to form and sustain such collaborative alliances for the best possible outcomes across the broadest base of the cultural spectrum.

Editor's Note: As CBHD continues in our work to explore, equip, and engage, we are pleased to offer guidance to members of the Center regarding the logistics of event planning, as well as strategic counsel on content from our executive staff. In select cases such as this one, the Center may even extend financial assistance to expand the potential impact of a given event. For more information regarding these services to members, please contact Jennifer McVey (CBHD Event and Education Manager) at jmcvey@cbhd.org. Funding to support such opportunities is limited, and each case is weighed accordingly. If you are interested in making a designated gift to expand the Center's ability to fund strategic event opportunities like this one, please contact Paige Cunningham at pcunningham@cbhd.org.