

2. Director's Report



Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, and indeed partly because of it, the Queensland Bioethics Centre (QBC) has had a very busy and productive year from October 2019 to September 2020. Even though some planned events had to be postponed or cancelled, new opportunities continually arose. This report covers the third year of operations of the Queensland Bioethics Centre (QBC) as a collaboration between the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane and Australian Catholic University. I acknowledge the important support of our partners in funding: the Bishops of the Province of Queensland, Mater Group, St Vincent's Health Australia, and Southern Cross Care (QLD).

The most important news is that the funding agreement between the Archdiocese of Brisbane and ACU has been renewed to December 2023. The financial support of the Archdiocese, and our other partners in funding, is essential to existence of the QBC. This renewal provides a platform for continued growth of the QBC as an important resource of bioethical expertise in Queensland.

Testament to this growth is a new agreement with Mater Group. Building on the cooperation agreement signed last year, Mater will fund two-thirds of a position in the QBC. The Mater Senior Lecturer in Healthcare Ethics will be appointed for five years. The other third of the position will be funded by ACU through teaching into programs in the Faculties of Health Sciences and of Theology and Philosophy.

In 2021, the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy is launching a new Bioethics Specialisation in its Master's in Theological Studies. The degree enables eligible candidates from any discipline to gain foundational theological and philosophical knowledge before proceeding to formal units or customised supervised studies in bioethics. A substantial research project provides an excellent opportunity to produce research relevant to their employers with the support of experts in the QBC and ACU. This research component offers a pathway to doctoral studies. I am proud of the QBC's involvement in developing this avenue to enhance bioethical capacity in Queensland, and encourage our supporters to consider ways in which they can support candidates to pursue bioethical study through this program.

The QBC's research continues to produce high-quality results. I co-authored an article with Dr Chi Wai Lui in *Bioethics*, 'Public reasoning about voluntary assisted dying: An analysis of submissions to the Queensland Parliament, Australia.' A pre-print version of this article was also supplied to the Queensland parliamentary inquiry committee into voluntary assisted dying prior to the release of their final report. I was also invited by the editors of the *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, which is the official journal of the Australasian Association of Bioethics and Health Law, to submit an article to a special COVID-19 symposium. The article is titled 'Dignity, Autonomy, and Allocation of Scarce Medical Resources During COVID-19'. Both articles are open-access and thus freely available.

Research responses to COVID-19 are important. I have agreed to represent ACU on the recently established working group of the Strategic Alliance of Catholic Research Universities (SACRU) to address these responses.

The QBC's input into education consisted of numerous professional development engagements with schools in Brisbane, and an offering of THCP614: Catholic Sexual Ethics for a cohort from Brisbane Catholic Education. This unit will be offered again in 2021 in Adelaide and Brisbane. In addition, I facilitated the module in Catholic Social Thought offered as part of the Mission Leadership Program. This program has moved from Catholic Health Australia to ACU.

Public engagement included articles on resource allocation during COVID-19 for news.com.au and ACU Impact, a podcast interview as part of ACU's new 'Thinking Philosophy' series, and an interview for the Holy Spirit Seminary's Co-Constructing Theology Series on Catholic responses to the economic impact of COVID-19.

In January 2020, my work as Roman Catholic Commissioner on the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches continued with a meeting in Geneva, which included a presentation of the work of our study group on moral discernment at the WCC headquarters. I was subsequently invited to present this work at the meeting of the WCC's Commission of the Churches for International Affairs in Brisbane in February 2020. It was clear from the meeting of the CCIA, which dealt with the fires in Australia and threats to island nations from rising sea levels, that climate change is a critical challenge that requires action as soon as possible. In the coming year, I aim to expand the QBC's capacity to address this area of bioethics, which is closely connected to the risk of public health emergencies like COVID-19. As the climate changes, our capacity to deal with natural disasters, new pandemics, the spread of tropical diseases to areas that have so far been immune, and so on, will raise new ethical challenges. The centre will welcome support or collaboration from our supporters in any of these areas in the future.

David G. Kirchhoffer
Brisbane, 30 September 2020