Mass for Healthcare Professionals 2026

Homily of Bishop John Barres

St. Anthony's High School

Tuesday, October 20, 2026 6:00pm

This evening, we gather for our annual *Mass for Health Care Professionals* organized by *Catholic Health*.

As you know, this Mass is traditionally celebrated around October 18th, the Feast of Saint Luke the Evangelist, and tonight we have the readings and prayers proper to his feast day.

Scripture tells us Saint Luke was a doctor - a "beloved physician" in the words of Saint Paul (Col. 4:14). Perhaps this is why he beautifully recounts stories of Our Lord's miraculous healings in his Gospel and emphasizes the tender mercy of Jesus.

Scripture also shows Saint Luke to be a steadfast companion. Our first reading tells how he remained with the Apostle to the Gentiles while others deserted him during his imprisonment.

As a Gospel writer and co-worker of Saint Paul, Saint Luke lived the missionary mandate he relates in tonight's Gospel passage. Indeed, with zeal for the Lord, he joyfully proclaimed the Good News and made known "the glorious splendor of [God's] kingdom" (*Responsorial Psalm 145*).

Under Saint Luke's patronage and through his intercession, we gather in this beautiful chapel to thank Almighty God for all involved in healthcare: administrators, doctors, physician assistants, nurses, technicians, aides, emergency personnel, chaplains and pastoral care minsters, support staff, and dedicated volunteers and caregivers.

We come with gratitude for your witness to the healing presence and ministry of Jesus Christ, as well as with prayers for your protection and well-being.

Personally, know of my deep appreciation for the ministry that is yours and for your fidelity to the mission of mercy of the Catholic Church.

It is important to emphasize at this Mass that we honor and pray for all healthcare professionals on Long Island, wherever they serve.

We are here because of our common desire to integrate the healing mission of Jesus Christ and the mission of the Church more deeply into our lives and work as healthcare professionals.

While we pray for all healthcare professionals in every context, we also pray for the mission of *Catholic Health* here on Long Island. Our *Catholic Health* system strives to assist all in this important work of mission integration.

In a special way, I would like to recognize Sr. Miriam MacLean, R.S.M. and Sr. Karoline Marie To, R.S.M., Religious Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan, who serve as co-Senior Vice Presidents of Mission Integration at *Catholic Health*.

Sr. Miriam has a doctorate in social work and served as the Executive Director of Catholic Charities of Southwest Louisiana, where she had extensive experience in disaster relief.

Sr. Karoline Marie has a law degree from St. Louis University, practiced law as a litigator, and has recently completed her doctorate in biomedical ethics at Regina Apostolorum University in Rome.

Catholic Health is a powerful expression of the Catholic evangelizing missionary spirit of which we hear in tonight's Gospel.

In his Apostolic Exhortation, *The Word of the Lord*, Pope Benedict writes: "Word and Eucharist are so deeply bound together that we cannot understand one without the other: the Word of God sacramentally takes flesh in the event of the Eucharist. The Eucharist opens us to an understanding of Scripture, just as Scripture for its part illumines and explains the mystery of the Eucharist." (55)

The rhythm of every dimension of the operations of *Catholic Health* is a Biblical rhythm and a Eucharistic rhythm.

Indeed, at the heart of each of our hospitals and many of our institutions is a chapel where the Word of God is proclaimed, Mass is celebrated, and where the Lord dwells in the Most Blessed Sacrament.

The same Lord Jesus who loved, cared for, and healed the sick and suffering is present still – really and truly - in those chapels. He is near to our patients and their family members, and he is close to every healthcare worker and volunteer. He is a never-failing source of strength and comfort.

We are all Eucharistic missionaries at *Catholic Health* and our goal is that our patients are beautifully moved by our Masses, our pastoral and Eucharistic ministry, and our evangelizing Eucharistic witness.

Our hospital rooms and hallways - always framed by Crucifixes - radiate the graces and power of the Eucharist and the beautiful rhythm of the Rite of the Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick: "Through this holy anointing may the Lord in his love and mercy help you with the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord who frees you from sin save you and raise you up."

Since the founding of our *Catholic Health* hospitals by our bold, pioneering communities of women religious, patients have experienced the power of the Eucharist through the Cross of their sicknesses and suffering.

So many have come back to the full practice of their Catholic Faith through an experience of pastoral Eucharistic ministry and the Sacraments of Penance and Anointing of the Sick at *Catholic Health*.

Catholic Health has always been about Eucharistic evangelization.

And so, at this *Mass for Health Care Professionals,* we allow the Holy Spirit to continue to lead and guide us in the ways of sacrifice and the Cross, in the ways of courage, compassion, and healthcare heroism.

The 2025 *Ethical and Religious Directives* set forth by the Bishops of the United States in union with the Magisterium of the Church are used system-wide to assist in this process.

Lived well, they challenge and encourage all of us in healthcare, and especially in *Catholic Health*, to live more deeply committed to recognizing the sanctity of human life and the power of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in our daily healthcare work.

The mission of *Catholic Health* integrates the truths of the Gospel of Life and our Catholic Social Justice teaching and the objective truths of Catholic moral teaching

by recognizing the dignity of the human person created in the image and likeness of God.

Pope Leo XIV's encyclical *Magnifica Humanitas* gives us powerful guidance for the ethical deployment of Artificial Intelligence in the healthcare world.

In the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 25, Jesus challenges us, "Whatever you did for the least among you, you did for me." How could we imagine the least among us without including the poor, the elderly, the abandoned, the immigrant, the refugee, and the defenseless life of the child in the womb?

Similarly, we are clear that it is not possible to invoke our Faith, or the heroes of our Faith, such as Saint Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her love for the poor in the gutters of the world, without also invoking our teaching on the sanctity of human life as the foundation of all other human rights.

When Mother Teresa received the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10, 1979, she boldly proclaimed to the world in her acceptance speech, "…the greatest destroyer of peace today is the cry of the innocent unborn child."

At *Catholic Health*, we are also bold in proclaiming the truth of the human person. Each person, from the child *in utero* to the elder in bed, is made in God's image and likeness. Unique and unrepeatable, each is always a gift and never a burden, a child of God and so our brother or sister to be loved for who they are – God's splendid creation - and not for any perceived usefulness or benefit to society.

To this end, at *Catholic Health*, we are clear-sighted and vigilant about government attempts to force our Catholic hospitals to be involved in those things that go against the dignity of the human person and purport to be healthcare: abortion; assisted suicide; sterilization; in vitro fertilization; transgender surgeries, even on minors; and gender-affirming hormone therapy.

For instance, I, as the Bishop of Rockville Centre - with *Catholic Health* and with nursing homes run by heroic Catholic women religious, including the Missionary Sisters of Saint Benedict in nearby Greenlawn - have filed a federal lawsuit against the State of New York to defend the religious liberty and conscience rights of Catholics and all citizens of New York State.

At my direction as Diocesan Bishop, the Diocese of Rockville Centre and *Catholic Health* are the lead plaintiffs in a lawsuit against the State of New York that challenges, on constitutional grounds, certain provisions of the state's recently enacted assisted suicide law.

The Diocese and *Catholic Health* are represented pro bono by the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty, one of the foremost legal defense funds in the United States dedicated to protecting the constitutional rights of religious organizations.

Why file suit?

Let me give you a few examples of New York State's egregious overreach in the Medical Aid in Dying (MAID) Act:

1) In our Catholic hospitals, even if we do not provide drugs for a patient's suicide, the state would force us to facilitate a transfer, so the patient could self-administer drugs elsewhere. We will not comply. We cannot participate in any way in someone taking their own life.

2) In the Act, the state also forces healthcare professionals to lie about the cause of death on death certificates, stating that the underlying illness was the cause of death, not the suicide drugs. Our assumption is that this is meant to cover up the numbers and distort the data regarding assisted suicides in New York State. No one should be forced to lie.

3) The state is also threatening *Catholic Health* with fines, sanctions, and even criminal penalties if we refuse to counsel patients toward suicide.

The need for our lawsuit is obvious. We cannot stand by.

The suit's goal is to guarantee the protection of the religious liberty rights of our Catholic hospitals and related healthcare entities by asking a federal judge to invalidate any provision in the law that would compel our institutions to participate or facilitate, in any way, the commission of assisted suicide.

There is something quite beautiful about the way the Church is protecting patients here. This is not just about the Church insisting on its own right to do things its own way. It is also about protecting vulnerable patients whom the Church is committed to caring for and loving, not killing.

And the Church preserving its ability to do that also helps protect people of all faiths in the state, because every person ought to be allowed by the government to choose a healthcare provider who is committed to healing, love, and service, without offering suicide as a solution.

It is terrible and shameful for New York to try to eliminate all choice, so that everyone must go to a healthcare provider who would offer suicide as an option. Catholic healthcare should be free to serve patients who want a life-affirming alternative.

Our Catholic institutions will not participate in anything that forces healthcare workers to violate their consciences or the dignity of the human person. Affected Catholic and faith-based institutions around the United States including *Catholic Health*, are well positioned to fight the Rule in the courts should that become necessary.

For our Catholics working in secular hospitals, we are also defending your conscience and religious liberty rights in New York State. We are defending the conscience and religious liberty rights of all New Yorkers and all Americans.

The Diocese and *Catholic Health* will do its part.

Catholics and good-willed people of all faiths or none must be prepared to make their voices heard for the sake of the conscience and religious liberty rights of all Americans.

Could Saint Luke have imagined these challenges when he practiced medicine?

We do not know.

But we do know that the Evangelist is with us this night and always, offering a steadfast witness and a fervent prayer of intercession.

He did not desert Saint Paul, and he will not desert us!

Nor will Jesus Christ, whom we serve in the sick and suffering and whose ministry we continue as healthcare professionals.

“Behold, I am with you always, until the end of the age,” says the Lord (Mt. 28:20). Thanks be to God, he is!

Mary, Mother of the Church and Health of the Sick, pray for us!

Saint Joseph, pray for us!

Saint Luke, pray for us!

All Saints dedicated to the practice of medicine and healthcare, pray for us!