

Bioethical Issues in the Contemporary Environment

The CCJWA Annual General Meeting, this year held at the Mary Locket Hall, Claremont, at 2.30 pm on Sunday 26 February, hosted bioethicist Reverend Dr Joseph Parkinson, Director of Catholic Bioethics Perth.

Members, augmented by honorary life members, and guests, gathered to witness the business proceedings presented by the Chair, Reverend Marie Wilson.

Rev Wilson summed up events of 2022, then reflected that life entails difference of opinion, even on the most trivial domestic levels — sometimes leading to conflict — and noted that CCJWA acknowledges similar tensions in the religious sphere.

This was a fitting opening to Dr Parkinson's address. In a satisfyingly succinct and organised exploration, he effectively addressed what happens when uninformed opinion becomes the basis for laws in health and wellbeing — the relationship between law and ethics being of primary significance. Noting that bioethics concerns human health and wellbeing *in all* its dimensions, Dr Parkinson identified ten current areas that are critical to health and wellbeing, in which issues arose. He observed that issues in bioethics are caused by unforeseen social changes rather than merely evolving, and outlined four such spheres: (i) populism, where media manipulates the public good, rather than objectivity informing it; (ii) the rise of *Cancel Culture* via social pressure groups; (iii) a shift from a doctor–patient notion to a supply-and-demand model (to a 'health-provider' transaction); and (iv) the need for a solid evidence base in medicine. While positive outcomes can occur simply through social change, he suggested scientific study offered more reliable outcomes.

Dr Parkinson offered examples in relation to each of these issue-causing scenarios, for example, the attraction of the business of non-medical treatments alongside a loss of General Practitioners, and the rise of privately owned fertility clinics as businesses which are vulnerable to optimising profits ahead of filling needs.

In place of the circularity of media-based polling (via loaded questions) — where public opinion becomes law, often leading to psychological trauma or invasive medical treatment — Dr Parkinson proposed evidence-based practice and treatments as more humane, by addressing issues in their specificity.

A Q and A time led to welcome discussion, where Dr Parkinson shared his experience from a comprehensive array of roles: as a committee member of Human Research Ethics Committee of St John of God Healthcare Inc, of the Clinical Ethics Consultancy Service of the Women's and Children's Health Service of WA, as a former member of the Reproductive Technology Council at the Health Department of WA, and a Trustee of St John of God Healthcare. Dr Parkinson's current research areas include pastoral care of same-sex attracted persons, and gender incongruence in children and adolescents.

Life experience and research informed this very successful CCJWA event. Dr Parkinson's address may be accessed on <https://ccjwa.org/events/#AGM2022> or <https://ccjwa.org/home/resources/library/>.

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