

by Michael J. Sleasman, PhD
Managing Director & Research Scholar

A long awaited greeting from The Center for Bioethics & Human Dignity. For those of you who have been involved with the Center for some time you are aware that this is a long delayed issue of *Dignitas*. The spring and summer were an exceptionally busy time around the Center with the completion of our first full-scale offsite conference, *Extending Life: Setting the Agenda for the Ethics of Aging, Death and Immortality*, held in March 2008, Phoenix, Arizona, as well as our 15th Annual Summer Conference, *Healthcare and the Common Good*. In lieu of our Spring and Summer editions, we offer you a combined issue with expanded content. Some of the pieces in this issue include highlights of both 2008 conference events, two essays by featured CBHD fellow, Gregory Rutecki, MD, updates on activities from CBHD staff members and fellows, as well as a focus on several key resources. We will resume our normal quarterly editions of *Dignitas* with the next issue (to arrive in early December), also in an expanded format, and finally unveil a new *Dignitas* design in the subsequent issue along with a highly anticipated logo redesign.

In addition to conferencing, the spring and summer brought a variety of other Center activities as well. We saw the release of J. Daryl Charles, *Retrieving Natural Law*, another volume in CBHD's *Critical Issues in Bioethics Series* with Eerdmans. The Center worked with several seminary students through internship and field education opportunities to produce early drafts of various bioethics and cultural engagement materials for the church. Through the generosity of a large gift, the Center initiated a multimedia conversion project that will create a digital archive of all the Center audio and video holdings, as well as the initiation of a complete redesign of www.cbhd.org to make the website more flexible, interactive, and user friendly. These projects should come to completion this winter.

These months also marked a point of sadness for the Center. In December 2007, our director, Dr. C. Ben Mitchell, announced that he would step down in July 2008 to refocus his energy teaching and writing. In his two years with the Center, Ben provided key leadership in a difficult time, serving as the architect of the merger of CBHD with Trinity International University. With the news of Ben's departure, the Center entered into the search process for a new executive director to provide strategic leadership and vision to the work of the Center for many years to come. Through the generosity of a large gift, the executive director's post of the Center has been expanded from a part time to a full time leadership position. Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers as the search process continues and we seek to fill this important position. We are confident that the Center is poised to continue engaging society in the area of bioethics in profound ways, and believe that with the right leadership we can expand the impact of the Center even more.

The past few months also have been busy in the world of bioethics. The march of scientific advances, as well as medical and technological innovation, continues to move forward at breakneck speed raising profound questions for what it means to be human and challenges to the fundamental notion of human dignity. Promising advances in alternatives to embryonic stem cells—from the developments with stem cells extracted from teeth, menstrual blood, and cord blood to the exciting research surrounding induced pluripotent stem cells derived from skin cells and the possibilities of direct reprogramming offer innovative approaches—to bypass some of the traditional ethical concerns surrounding embryo-destructive research. While some of these advances may themselves raise ethical concerns, they point to the importance of cutting edge bioethical news and commentary to foster awareness and critical reflection on the scientific and technological marvels of our day. Recent months have seen the developing storm surrounding right of conscience for physicians and pharmacists. Assaults on human dignity continue to abound with a news story reported in August of terminal patients in Oregon being offered "doctor-assisted suicide instead of medical care."¹ Internationally, animal-human hybrid protocols have been approved in the UK and a license granted for the cloning of human embryos in Australia.

These emerging issues are only the tip of the iceberg. We invite you to join us in our work to engage these pressing bioethical challenges. Throughout the pages of this issue we offer a variety of ways to get involved with the Center and to utilize our resources, and we hope that you will take full advantage of them.



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1). Springer, Dan. "Oregon Offers Terminal Patients Doctor-Assisted Suicide Instead of Medical Care" Fox News July 28, 2008. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,392962,00.html>, accessed on October 6, 2008.