

The Plunkett Centre for Ethics

Annual Report 2021



Mission

The Mission of the Centre is to promote the values of compassion and fellowship, intellectual and professional excellence, and fairness and justice. Its primary focus is on the realisation of these values in the provision and allocation of health care. The Centre expresses this commitment through research, teaching and community engagement, as these are informed by the Catholic tradition.

Objectives

- To deepen and advance knowledge and understanding of the ethical standards relevant to human health and well-being, and in particular to clinical practice, medical research, business and management practices, and the allocation of healthcare resources.
- To offer courses in philosophical ethics and in the ethics of healthcare provision, medical research and healthcare resource allocation.
- To engage and where appropriate to collaborate with local, national and international bodies as they seek to respond to their intellectual and ethical needs.
- To foster collaboration on ethical matters between Australian Catholic University, St Vincent's Health Australia, Sydney, and Calvary Healthcare.

Functions

- Conducting and promoting research.
- Providing research training and supervision.
- Developing and teaching courses.
- Conducting reviews of professional practice.
- Providing an ethics consultation service.
- Participating in public discussions.

John Hubert Plunkett

John Hubert Plunkett was the first Catholic Solicitor-General and the first Catholic Attorney-General of New South Wales. He was, at various times, a member of both the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly, a member of the first Senate of the University of Sydney and an early Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was the first Chairman of the Board of Education of New South Wales and a founding fellow of St. John's College at the University. He was also a great friend and benefactor of the Sisters of Charity in Australia.



Plunkett was born in Roscommon in Ireland in June, 1802. In 1830 he was appointed Solicitor-General in New South Wales. In 1836, he became Attorney-General, a remarkable achievement for an Irishman and Catholic. As chief law officer, Plunkett made an important contribution to the slow and difficult process by which the penal colony of New South Wales developed the institutions of a free society.

Plunkett was a leader in establishing civil rights in Australia. He drafted the Magistrate's Act, which abolished summary punishment, the administration of justice by private householders and the excessive use of the lash. He argued successfully for the abolition of convict assignment. He secured jury rights for emancipists. He extended the protection of the law to convicts and assigned servants. After securing the conviction of seven white men for the killing of an Aborigine at Myall Creek in 1838 (in a massacre in which the whole tribe was killed), he extended the protection of the law for the first time to Aborigines. But as a Catholic who knew what emancipation meant, Plunkett himself considered the Church Act of 1836, which disestablished the Church of England, his most important single achievement.

When the Sisters of Charity arrived in Sydney from Ireland in 1838, Plunkett organised a public appeal to establish their first hospital in Sydney and helped the Sisters to acquire the narrow strip of land along Victoria Street in Darlinghurst to which the first St. Vincent's Hospital, which had opened its doors in Potts Point, was relocated in 1870. Plunkett's two great recreations were the violin and Irish folk music. He died in May, 1869, and was buried in Sydney's Devonshire Street cemetery.

Thousands of Australians, of every religious belief and of none, have experienced the first-class health care that is inspired by the Sisters of Charity. Others have been educated by the Sisters. There are, thus, many Australians with reason to be grateful for the kind and practical help which John Hubert Plunkett gave to the women who founded the Sisters of Charity in Australia.

Management Committee



Mr Tim Daniel
Chief Executive Officer
St Vincent's Private Hospital
Sydney (until December)



Mr Mark Green
Director of Mission,
Calvary Healthcare



Professor Dermot Nestor,
Executive Dean,
Faculty of Theology &
Philosophy, ACU



Professor Hayden Ramsay,
Deputy Vice-Chancellor,
Ethics, ACU



Professor Anthony Schembri,
Chief Executive Officer,
St Vincent's Health Network
Sydney



Dr Bernadette Tobin,
Director
Plunkett Centre for Ethics

From the Chair

We have all run out of adjectives to describe 2021. The best thing about it may be that it is behind us.

That said, the Plunkett Centre for Ethics continued to operate and achieve its objectives through the public health restrictions.

In fact, our Mission—to pursue compassion, excellence and justice in the provision and allocation of healthcare—became even more urgent and relevant during the pandemic.



We were particularly grateful and humbled in meetings with our hospital partners. Colleagues often attended these meetings straight from the front line, at which they had been involved in life-and-death decisions and very long hours of work. Everyone at Plunkett was filled with respect and admiration for our hospital colleagues. New light was shed on the great relevance of our ethics work in the pandemic context.

Our team at Plunkett is small and focussed. As well as core business, staff have engaged with ACU faculty, academics, clinicians and external partners throughout the past twelve months. Our research has continued to grow, we have submitted or appeared before public bodies, given assistance to the Church and continued the main work of supporting our hospital and other healthcare partners.

I am particularly pleased about the new collaboration with Mercy at Melbourne - Plunkett@Mercy - and believe real benefit for both partners will emerge from this work. The Archdiocese of Melbourne had for some time encouraged us to make this move and we are pleased to be extending our operations in Victoria.

Beginning discussion around a fresh Memorandum of Understanding is exciting. We anticipate more partners and hope we can expand our services and together continue to invest in healthcare ethics for 2022 and beyond.

**Professor Hayden Ramsay
Deputy Vice Chancellor, Ethics
Australian Catholic University**

Staff

Philippa Byers

M Social Work, University of Sydney
PhD, University of Sydney
Honorary Fellow



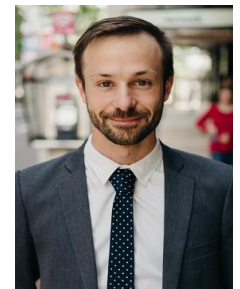
Steve Matthews

BA (Hons) Monash University
PhD, Monash University
Senior Research Fellow in Philosophy, ACU



Xavier Symons

BA Adv. Hons, USyd, MA (Res) USyd
PhD, Australian Catholic University
MSt, Practical Ethics (Oxon)
Postdoctoral Research Fellow, ACU
Honorary Research Assoc, Institute for Ethics and Society, UNDA



Bernadette Tobin AO GCSG

MA MEd University of Melbourne
PhD, University of Cambridge
Reader in Philosophy, ACU
Conjoint Associate Professor, UNSW & USyd



Pip Wilson

Administrative Assistant



From the Director

In 2021, we continued to face the challenges of working during a pandemic. Of course, it was not as hard for us as it was for so many others: we were able to conduct our affairs by a combination of on-line meetings and seminars and working from home arrangements. Not everyone was so blessed.

During the year, the Centre hosted (on its own or in collaboration with others) a series of seminars, often 'webinars'. Topics included Carter Snead's discussion (with Michael Wee) of a 'new approach to healthcare ethics', Steve Matthews' and Kirsten Challinor's recommendations for making aged care a safe place for home and work, and Xavier Symons' discussion (with Natasha Michael) of courage and conscientiousness as 'everyday virtues' in healthcare. Our Annual Plunkett Lecture took the form of a presentation at Grand Rounds at St Vincent's Hospital to mark the twentieth anniversary of the sequencing of the Human Genome, that tool which increasingly enables us to understand the contribution of genetics to human health and disease.

Xavier Symons spent the second half of the year, on a Fulbright Scholarship, at the Kennedy Institute of Ethics at Georgetown University. He put the finishing touches to his forthcoming book on respect for conscientious judgement in healthcare whilst advancing his research on the ethical issues in the care of people with dementia.

Towards the end of the year, as a part of the partnership called "Plunkett@Mercy", we were joined by Dr Marija Kirjanenko, an experienced Emergency Physician with a Masters in Critical Care Medicine from Cardiff University. Marija will be located at the Mercy Hospital in Melbourne, where she will contribute to the development of research-informed resources for professionals, especially in the areas of the ethics of women's health and neonatal care.

As the year drew to a close, we began our thinking about the next Memorandum of Understanding between the University and our 'participating partners'. The good news is that several additional hospitals have expressed interest in joining this collaborative arrangement in 2023. This reflects both the standing of our work in the eyes of our colleagues in the health and aged care sectors and also the commonality of challenges faced by colleagues in Catholic institutions.

Once again, I wish to acknowledge my respect for, admiration of and gratitude to my colleagues here at the Plunkett Centre.

Bernadette Tobin

Publications

Byers

Truthfulness and Deceit in Dementia Care: An argument for truthful regard as a morally significant human bond.' *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*, 31 ,3, September 2021

Matthews

'Truthfulness and Respect in Dementia Care.' Steve Matthews *Bioethics Outlook*, 32, 4, December, 2021.

'Respecting agency in dementia care: when should truthfulness give way.' Steve Matthews & Jeanette Kennett. *Journal of Applied Ethics*. Forthcoming.

'The Impact of Dementia on the Self: Do we consider ourselves the same as others?' (With Sophia Harris, Ameer Baird, Jeanette Kennett and Celia Harris). *Neuroethics*, 14, 281-294. 2021.

'The Relational Care Framework: Promoting Continuity or Maintenance of Selfhood in Person-Centred Care.' (Steve Matthews & Matthew Tieu). *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*. Forthcoming.

'Habit.' Steve Matthews. *International Encyclopedia of Ethics (Second ed)*. Hugh LaFollette (ed.). Wiley-Blackwell Print and Online, 2021.

'Dementia, Truthfulness, and Respecting Agency.' Steve Matthews & Jeanette Kennett. In *Justice Everywhere: a Blog about Philosophy in Public Affairs*. (justice-everywhere.org)

With Bernadette Tobin and Xavier Symons. 'Why should HCWs receive priority access to vaccines in a pandemic?'. *BMC Medical Ethics* 22;79 (2021): 1-9.

Symons

'Rationing, Responsibility and Blameworthiness: An Ethical Evaluation of Responsibility-Sensitive Policies for Healthcare Rationing.' Symons, Xavier and Reginald Chua. *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal*. vol. 31 no. 1, 2021, p. 53-76.

'Respect for persons and the allocation of lifesaving healthcare resources.' Xavier Symons. *Bioethics*. Vol. 35 no.5 2021, p.392-399. <https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12857>.

Publications, continued:

'Persuasion, not coercion or incentivisation, is the best means of promoting COVID-19 vaccination.' Pennings Susan and Xavier Symons. *Journal of Medical Ethics* Published online first: 27 January 2021. doi: 10.1136/medethics-2020-107076.

'Reflective disequilibrium: a critical evaluation of the complete lives framework for healthcare rationing.' Xavier Symons. *Journal of Medical Ethics*. Vol. 47, 2021: 108-112.

'The Content, Teaching Methods and Effectiveness of Spiritual Care Training for Healthcare Professionals: A Mixed-Methods Systematic Review.' Kate Jones, Piret Paal, Megan Best and Xavier Symons. *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*. Published online first March 20, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpainsymman.2021.03.013>.

"'Shlomi Segall. Why Inequality Matters: Luck Egalitarianism, Its Meaning and Value'", *Journal of Moral Philosophy* 18;4 (Aug 2021): 425-428.

'Why should HCWs receive priority access to vaccines in a pandemic?'. With Bernadette Tobin and Steve Matthews. *BMC Medical Ethics* 22;79 (2021): 1-9.

Tobin

The suffering of the family in the context of the care of a sick child, *Journal of Paediatrics and Child Health*, March 2021

'Is 'donation' really the best way to prevent mitochondrial disease?' *MercatorNet* 25 March 2021: <https://mercatornet.com/is-donation-really-the-best-way-to-prevent-mitochondrial-disease/71069/>.

With Steve Matthews and Xavier Symons. 'Why should HCWs receive priority access to vaccines in a pandemic?'. *BMC Medical Ethics* 22;79 (2021): 1-9.

'Choice will not be necessary OR Choice will be all that's necessary' *Bioethics Outlook*, 32, 4 December, 2021

Consultancies

A selection of ethical issues addressed:

- Ethics of vaccines mandates
- Palliative sedation in end-of-life care
- Ethics of offering 'off label' medications
- Surgery for 'gender re-assignment'
- Living related organ donation
- Elective surgery on an unvaccinated patient

Summary by source

Year	St Vincent's Health Australia	Calvary Healthcare	Cabrini Hospital	Other	Total
2021	27	7	6	22	62
2020	39	5	-	34	78
2019	30	9	-	18	57
2018	14	2	-	23	39
2017	32	-	-	11	43
2016	11	-	-	23	34
2015	16	-	-	22	38
2014	18	-	-	23	41
2013	14	-	-	16	30
2012	17	-	-	44	61

Summary by profession

Year	Admin (including bioethicists)	Medical	Nursing	Allied Health	Other	Total
2021	24	13	1	3	21	62
2020	23	9	1	3	42	78
2019	34*	9	2	3	9	57
2018	11	13	1	2	12	39
2017	12	19	-	2	10	43
2016	7	12	2	1	12	34
2015	3	13	6	2	14	38
2014	6	17	4	2	12	41
2013	7	12	2	1	8	30
2012	4	11	6	10	30	61

*Includes 18 Bioethicists

Clinical Ethics

Ethics with Executives and Clinical Staff

- The ethics of allocating vaccinations to all staff in a large hospital
- If VAD is legalised? Lessons from Victoria
- Inducting new managers: How to identify key elements in an ethics governance framework
- The rush to be treated: ethical challenges for healthcare practitioners
- Ethical issues in health and aged care.
- Cosmetic surgery
- Resource allocation in a pandemic
- Challenging cases in intensive care and emergency care
- Everything you have ever wanted to know about healthcare ethics in the Catholic tradition!
- When family disagree with healthcare staff: the care of people with advanced dementia and the care of a woman about to give birth.

Submissions to Public Inquiries

Symons

- Submission to the Standing Committee on Law and Justice. Inquiry into the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021 (NSW).

Tobin

- Department of Health re proposed introduction of legislation to permit mitochondrial donation in Australia, March
- World Medical Association re proposed revision to Code of Ethics, June
- Queensland Parliament's Health and Environment Committee re VAD, July
- RACP re Clinical Ethics Competencies (with Kathy Wu) July
- Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee re Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform Bill 2021, July
- Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee: re Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform Bill, 2021, August
- NSW MOH: Organ and Tissue Donation, Use and Retention: Deceased and Living Donors (with Dr Suhel al-Soufi, and on behalf of St Vincent's Public Hospital) August
- Further proposals Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform Bill 2021 (with Megan Best), November
- NSW Parliament re VAD Bill, November
- Appearance before NSW Parliamentary Enquiry, November

Presentations

Matthews

- Taking great care: person-centred care with compassion, Plunkett Centre webinar: Aged Care: a safe place for home and work, October

Symons

- Everyday virtue; courage and conscientiousness in healthcare, Plunkett Centre webinar, discussion (with Natasha Michael), January
- To vaccinate or not to vaccinate. *Theology on Tap*, March
- The ethics of vaccination. *Association of Independent Schools NSW*, November
- An attitude toward a soul: Dementia and personhood. *Society for Christian Bioethics Annual Conference*, December.

Tobin

- The right to religious freedom: a threat to equality or an aspect of equality? McGowan Centre for Ethics and Social Responsibility, Kings College, Pennsylvania:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHLOUywEufc>
- Mitochondrial donation: ethical questions raised by Commonwealth's proposals to legalise, Medical Students, University of Notre Dame Australia.
- Socrates on the relation of ethics to religious belief. Dinner, Parish priests and School Leaders, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, NSW
- Responding to gender dysphoria in schools: Gathering of Parish priests and School Leaders, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, NSW
- Medical treatment and care at the end of life: key principles from the Hippocratic, Jewish and Christian traditions: Parish priests and School Leaders, Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle.
- Ethical questions re vaccinations in a pandemic, Medical Students, UNDA
- Presentations re Mitochondrial Donation Law Reform Bill to Liberal and National MPs and to Labour MPs, Parliament House, Canberra.
- Are there religious requirements re making of resuscitation plans? Medical oncologists, SVH, Kinghorn Centre, Sydney.

- Why we oppose VAD- theological reasons. MAM Trustees, SVHA Board
- The ethics & politics of euthanasia (with Tony Abbott, AC), UTS Catholic Society
- 20th anniversary of Human Genome Project: ethical questions, St Vincent's Hospital
- Conscientious objection in healthcare: its appropriate scope and limits (with Julian Savulescu), Masters of Law students, UniMelb.
- Mitochondrial donation: ethical questions raised by Commonwealth's proposals to legalise, Medical Students, University of Notre Dame Australia.
- Socrates on the relation of ethics to religious belief. Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, NSW
- Responding to gender dysphoria in schools: Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle, NSW
- Ethical questions re vaccinations in a pandemic, Medical Students, University of Notre Dame Australia.

Teaching

Matthews:

PhD Supervision, (Macquarie University)

Masters Supervision, (La Trobe University)

Honours Thesis, (University of Tasmania)

Tobin:

Medical Ethics, UNSW & UNDA medical students on palliative care round

Symons:

Bioethics, UNDA Studies in Bioethics



Media

Matthews

- Social media management (Twitter). The Plunkett Centre for Ethics (@PlunkettCentre) / Twitter. (526 followers @ August 4.)
- Interview/Presentation: with Anna Trichet (ThisFilm Studios) on dementia and ethics
- Facilitator. Courage and Conscience in Professional Life. Webinar held July 6, 2021
- “Taking Great Care: Person-centred Care with Compassion.” (PCE Webinar Aged Care: a safe place for home and work). October 26, 2021.

Symons

- Article on vaccine reporting quoted in opinion piece by Chris Mitchell. ‘Nothing fake about the ABC’s vaccine bias’. *The Australian* 2nd August 2021.
- Interview with Craig Hamilton on the ethics of COVID-19 vaccine access. *ABC Upper Hunter* Monday 2nd August 2021.
- Quoted in an article by Cameron English. “How Do You Encourage Vaccine Skepticism? CNN, Max Boot Teach Us How”. *American Council on Science and Health* 21st July 2021.
- “Discovering our common humanity in a post-pandemic world”. *ABC Religion and Ethics* 12th July 2021.
- “COVID-19 vaccine confidence and the ethics of media reporting”. *ABC Religion and Ethics* 26th April 2021.
- Quoted by Caitlin Fitzsimmons. “‘I’m not anti-vaccine’: Why Genevieve is waiting for Pfizer”. *Sydney Morning Herald* 23rd May 2021.
- Love to the very end: toward a theology of dementia. *Church Life Journal* 3rd December 2021.
- An attitude toward a soul: dementia and personhood. *ABC Religion and Ethics* 18th October 2021.
- COVID-19 and pandemic ethics: travel bans, aged care vaccination and vaccine hesitancy. *The Today Show* interview with Rebbeca Maddern and Richard Wilkins 8th May 2021.
- Informed consent and the vaccine roll-out in aged care. *ABC News Radio* 23rd February 2021.
- COVID-19 vaccine consent for aged care residents: it’s ethically tricky, but there are ways to get it right. *The Conversation* 19th February 2021.

Tobin

- The right to religious freedom: a threat to equality or an aspect of equality? McGowan Centre for Ethics and Social Responsibility, Kings College, Pennsylvania:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHLOUyEufc>
- Hosting webinar series on the ethics of pandemics: International Association of Catholic Bioethics
- Quoted in article in *Catholic Weekly*: IVF tech concerns, 5th April 2021
- Interviewed by Tom Burns for YouTube discussion of ‘infant euthanasia’: 11th May.
- Interviewed by Melissa Maddison, ABC Regional, re QLD VAD Bill: 9th July

- Quoted in *New Outlook* (Tucson Archdiocese On-Line), *Cath News*; *Catholic Weekly*; *Boston Pilot*, *Crux*, *Catholic Weekly*: 25-27 August, re VAD
- Quoted in *Australian Financial Review*, 28th August, re 'booster shots and our responsibilities to poorer neighbouring countries'
- The common good - and vaccination. *Aurora*. 19th October 2021
<https://mnnews.today/aurora/october-2021/54868-the-common-good/>
- 10.11.21 It's inevitable that rules on euthanasia will be expanded, *The Australian*,
<https://www.theaustralian.com.au/commentary/its-inevitable-that-rules-on-euthanasia-will-be-expanded/news-story/826553eb65164a684ddfbdaf69423f33>
- Interviewed by Phil Ackman, ABC Radio FNQ (Cairns) 15th November, re VAD laws



Xavier Symons, Fulbright Scholar,

ennedy Centre for Ethics, Georgetown University, Washington DC

Financial Report 2020/2021

		2020	2021
Carried Forward		25,401	13,623
Income			
	Partner Hospitals	219,268	247,973
	University	219,268	224,749
	Other income	11,169	10,568
	ACU Foundation	57,531	-
Total Income		532,637	496,913
Expenditure			
	Salaries	447,758	484,950
	Non-Salary Items		
	Conferences	0	0
	Consultancies	9,310	10,662
	Info Tech	26	438
	Library	414	0
	Plant and Equipment	4,579	0
	Rent & Utilities	44,795	38,605
	Travel Domestic	751	99
	Travel International	5,026	0
	Printing, subs, etc.	6,355	6,944
	Total non-salary expenditure	71,256	56,748
Total Expenditure		519,014	541,698
Carried Forward		13,623	*(44,785)

Note: \$44,785 Plunkett Centre funds transferred from ACU Foundation in 2022