

Physician and renowned bioethicist Edmund Pellegrino dies at age 92

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Dr. Edmund Pellegrino, regarded as a founding father in the field of bioethics, died June 13 at the age of 92.

In a career that spanned more than six decades, he was a renowned physician, ethicist, research scholar and administrator. Among his many accomplishments was founding and directing Georgetown University's Center for the Advanced Study of Ethics and he also was a former president of The Catholic University of America.

Pellegrino, who would have turned 93 on Saturday, attended daily Mass and once said his Catholic faith was the single most "important unifying element in my whole life."

"He was a faithful member of this archdiocese as well as a gifted scholar, teacher and healer," Washington Cardinal Donald Wuerl said in a statement. "In all of his many activities and services, he presented an endearing blend of scientific expertise and profound Catholic faith."

During his long tenure at Georgetown University, Pellegrino was the John Carroll professor of medicine and medical ethics at the university. He also was director of its Kennedy Institute of Ethics and founding director of its Center for Clinical Bioethics, which just this year was renamed the Edmund D. Pellegrino Center for Clinical Bioethics.

"We feel this loss deeply, and will always be grateful for Ed's countless contributions and his caring for our community, its members, and his profession," John DeGioia, Georgetown's president, said in a statement. "We will also carry with us his example -- of his remarkable capacity for both passion and gentleness, deep reflection and decisive action, intellect and heart."

The funeral Mass for Pellegrino is to be celebrated at noon Wednesday at his longtime parish, the Church of the Little Flower in Bethesda, Md., followed by burial in St. Gabriel's Cemetery in Potomac, Md.

"He saw bioethics through the prism of his Catholic faith," said Msgr. Peter Vaghi, Little Flower's pastor and chaplain of the archdiocese's John Carroll Society, a lay group that Pellegrino served as president.

The priest noted that Pellegrino was a "teacher and practitioner until the very end," teaching bioethics to students at Georgetown and visiting patients during his rounds at Georgetown University Hospital until the last week of his life.

This spring Pellegrino received the John Carroll Society's 2013 James Cardinal Hickey Lifetime Service Award.

He was one of three doctors who with the encouragement of the late Hickey, then Washington's archbishop, founded the Archdiocesan Health Care Network in 1984 to provide medical care for the area's poor, a program that continues today as part of the archdiocese's Catholic Charities. Today the network of 250 volunteer doctors, nurses and dentists, with the support of six participating hospitals and 60 clinics, serves 2,000 people a year,

providing \$7 million in charitable care for people with little or no health insurance.

Pellegrino also helped start the John Carroll Society's annual Rose Mass, attended each spring by people from the healing professions.

After receiving the Cardinal Hickey Award, Pellegrino told a reporter that he had entered the field of medicine because he had a scientific interest in that field, and continued because he found the best part of medicine is "treating the sick."

That sense of compassion, and his strong faith, led him to oppose assisted suicide and to champion universal access of health care.

The author of more than 600 published items in medical science, philosophy and ethics, he was also the author or co-author of 23 books. Many of his scholarly works on ethics were composed in the early morning hours on his antique Olivetti typewriter, and he had a personal library of about 6,000 books.

In 1978, he became the president of The Catholic University of America, and that next year helped host Pope John Paul II's visit to the university, when the pontiff addressed Catholic educators. In a statement, John Garvey, CUA's current president, praised his predecessor as "a distinguished scholar and educator who was lauded during his presidency for his administrative ability and his rapport with students, faculty and staff."

In 1998, Pellegrino received the University of Notre Dame's Laetare Medal -- considered one of the nation's highest honors for Catholics. Seven years later at the age of 85, he was named chairman of the President's Council on Bioethics, a panel created by President George W. Bush to advise him on bioethical issues. In 1994, Pellegrino was one of only four Americans named among the first 40 people worldwide to serve on the Vatican's Pontifical Academy for Life.

Jane Belford, the chancellor of the Archdiocese of Washington, met Pellegrino when he was president of the John Carroll Society. She praised him as a man of faith and a "brilliant physician, scholar and medical ethicist. ... Yet despite his renown and world-class reputation, he impressed me just as much with his qualities of humility, kindness and gentleness."

Pellegrino was preceded in death by his wife, Clementine, and by two of their children, Thomas and Stephen. He is survived by daughters Virginia, Andrea, Alice and Leah and son Michael; and two grandchildren and a great grandchild; and by his brother, Robert.

[Mark Zimmermann is editor of the *Catholic Standard*, newspaper of the Washington archdiocese.]

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