



MaterCare International 2026 Rome Conference Statement

“The Genius of Motherhood”

Rome, Italy

September 7-10, 2026

MaterCare International gathered in Rome for its 13th International Conference under the theme “The Genius of Motherhood.” Physicians, midwives, healthcare professionals, clergy, researchers and advocates from over 20 countries came together to reflect on the vocation of maternal healthcare and to strengthen our shared commitment to mothers, babies, families and the communities they sustain.

The conference began with a foundational call to personal holiness and conversion. MaterCare's work is rooted not only in professional excellence but in a recognition that the care of mothers and children is ultimately a participation in a larger vocation to serve the human person. We are called to keep both the realities of the present world and the hope of the world to come before us.

The conference affirmed motherhood as a profound human vocation with consequences far beyond the individual family. Motherhood shapes families, communities and cultures. It is not a secondary or lesser vocation, nor should it be understood primarily through the all too often used language of inconvenience, expense or limitation. Motherhood, and the special genius therein, is a tremendous expression of the capacity to receive, nurture, protect and give oneself for another.

The thematic dignity of motherhood flows from the dignity of the human person. Human life is a gift from God, and its dignity is not conferred by social status, ability, age, health, circumstances or the judgment of others. To support mothers is therefore to support the human person and the common good.

This requires societies to recognize the real sacrifices involved in motherhood while ensuring that women are not forced to choose between their own flourishing and the flourishing of their children. The challenges associated with pregnancy and motherhood should be met not by diminishing the value of either mother or child, but by building families and communities capable of accompanying and supporting them. Professor Bogdan Chazan led the conference

with his opening address on the conference theme.

The conference presentations also reflected on the complementarity of motherhood and fatherhood. Marriage and parenthood are not simply arrangements for individual fulfilment. They can become a path of self-gift, growth and sanctification, in which husband and wife learn to receive one another and their children as gifts. Fatherhood carries a particular responsibility to accompany and support mothers and children. Motherhood and fatherhood together reveal complementary dimensions of human love and responsibility. The preparation for marriage and parenthood must therefore include more than practical instruction. Young people need opportunities for psychological, relational, communal and spiritual formation so that they can learn the meaning of self-disclosure, responsiveness, fidelity and self-gift.

MaterCare International remains committed to serving mothers and babies wherever their needs are greatest. In communities where maternal and neonatal mortality remains high, this means supporting sustainable healthcare infrastructure, training, equipment and locally rooted initiatives. The conference heard encouraging reports from projects in Africa and Asia, demonstrating the life-changing effects of maternity care when communities are properly equipped and supported. The firsthand report from Project Sheema was presented by Sr Shanthi.

The goal is not short-term intervention but sustainable, locally grounded care. This is achieved through collaboration with local communities and religious orders whose mission is aligned.

Effective development begins with listening. Before seeking to solve a problem, we must understand it. Needs assessments, local leadership, cultural knowledge and long-term relationships are essential to ensuring that assistance strengthens rather than displaces the communities it seeks to serve.

The conference also highlighted the importance of supporting healthcare professionals themselves through education, professional formation and spiritual development.

The conference recognized that healthcare increasingly takes place within a rapidly changing information environment. The conference encouraged the use of images, listening, storytelling and other forms of communication that help bridge linguistic and cultural barriers. Above all, the human person must remain at the centre of our care and our decision making, as highlighted in His Holiness Pope Leo XIV's encyclical, *Magnifica Humanitas*.

Examining challenging questions in obstetrics and gynaecology, the conference showed practices and advancements seeking to apply sound medical reasoning together with the principles of Catholic moral theology. Participants explored the care of both mother and child in complicated pregnancies, the ethical treatment of miscarriage and ectopic pregnancy, previsible delivery, antenatal testing, perinatal palliative care and other difficult clinical circumstances.

The discussions demonstrated both the richness and the complexity of Catholic medical ethics. Participants did not shy away from areas where clinical, ethical and theological questions remain

difficult or where legitimate differences in professional judgment require further study and dialogue.

At the same time, the conference reaffirmed a fundamental principle:

The good of the mother and the good of her child must never be set against one another as though one human life can simply be discarded for the sake of another. This commitment includes the defence of every human life from conception, as affirmed in the Church's teaching, including St John Paul II's encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*.

Catholic medicine seeks to care for the whole patient and to act according to truth, conscience, proportionality and respect for human dignity. Where a child cannot be cured, care does not cease. Perinatal palliative care offers an important example of accompanying families with compassion when a life-limiting diagnosis is expected, affirming that neither disability nor impending death diminishes the child's dignity.

The conference also explored advances in the diagnosis and treatment of conditions affecting women's reproductive health and fertility.

The desire to conceive and bear children deserves medical care that seeks to understand and treat underlying conditions rather than reducing fertility to a technical problem.

Developing surgical expertise, improving diagnostic approaches and investigating new treatments can all serve the dignity of women when they are directed toward authentic health and the possibility of restoring natural fertility.

The conference emphasized the importance of responsible research, sound evidence and careful assessment of risks and benefits as medicine continues to develop.

The conference recognized the profound challenges facing young people who are growing up in an increasingly digital world. Young people need more than biological information. They need formation that addresses the emotional, intellectual, psychological, relational and spiritual dimensions of their lives. Holistic and not piecemeal approaches were offered as solutions.

Authentic human relationships cannot be replaced by digital connection. The formation of young people must therefore help them recover the capacity for attention, self-gift, responsibility, intimacy and genuine encounter.

The conference also reflected on the importance of conscience and freedom in healthcare. Healthcare professionals must be able to practice according to their sincerely held moral convictions without being forced to participate in practices they believe violate the dignity of human life. Respect for conscience is not a rejection of professional responsibility. Rather, conscience must be formed in truth and exercised with integrity, humility and responsibility. The experience of healthcare professionals facing moral distress and professional pressure reminds us that the protection of conscience remains an important dimension of a healthy healthcare system.

Across very different countries, cultures and healthcare systems, the conference revealed a remarkable commonality.

MaterCare's members face different circumstances, but they share a commitment to the same fundamental reality: Every mother matters. Every child matters. Every human person matters.

Whether the challenge is maternal mortality in a resource-poor community, the ethical complexity of a high-risk pregnancy, the isolation of a young person, the suffering associated with infertility, the diagnosis of a life-limiting condition or the increasing difficulty of navigating misinformation, the response begins with the same foundation: the dignity of the human person.

MaterCare International therefore renews its commitment to:

- promote safe, compassionate and ethical maternal healthcare;
- support mothers and babies, particularly where they are most vulnerable;
- strengthen sustainable, locally led healthcare initiatives;
- advance professional and spiritual formation for Catholic healthcare workers;
- pursue research and medical practice consistent with truth and human dignity;
- accompany families facing infertility, pregnancy complications, disability and loss;
- protect the freedom of conscience of healthcare professionals;
- equip young people for authentic relationships and responsible family life; and
- build relationships of trust across cultures, languages and communities.

MaterCare International also introduced four awards at this year's conference to acknowledge exceptional work and presentations; Saint Luke Award, Saint John Paul II Award, Saint Gianna Beretta Molla Award, and the Saints Cosmas and Damian Award.

Our time together in Rome has reminded us that MaterCare is more than a collection of projects, professions and countries. It is a community united by a shared vocation. We are called to bring together faith and medicine, truth and compassion, professional excellence and human accompaniment.

We are called to remember that the mother and child before us are never simply patients. They are persons entrusted to our care.

And we are called to build a culture in which motherhood is not treated as an inconvenience to be overcome, but as a profound expression of the human capacity to love and give life.

As we return to our countries and communities, we carry with us not simply new knowledge, but renewed responsibility.

MaterCare International remains committed to serving that truth through medicine, through education, through research, through advocacy, and above all, through relationships of love and service. We also remember with gratitude Dr Robert Walley, whose vision and dedication helped

establish MaterCare International and continue to inspire its mission.

From Rome, we return to the places where we are called to serve with renewed hope, strengthened by one another, and committed to the genius of motherhood.

MaterCare International
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