Vatican
News



Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, is seen at the White House in Washington Jan. 21, 2021. (CNS/Reuters/Jonathan Ernst)



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Several leading U.S. healthcare officials, the heads of two major companies that developed coronavirus vaccines and a number of celebrities will be taking part in a virtual Vatican-sponsored conference on advances in medical technology scheduled for May 6 to 8.

Among those set to take part in the "Unite to Prevent and Unite to Cure" conference, co-hosted by the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Culture and the U.S. non-profit Cura Foundation, is Dr. Anthony Fauci, the chief medical advisor to President Joe Biden and director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases.

In an email to NCR, Fauci said he is honored to be part of the event and hopes it will facilitate applying lessons learned during the coronavirus pandemic "in order to prepare to respond to future emerging and re-emerging infectious disease outbreaks and public health threats."

Other American officials set to take part in the conference include Dr. Francis Collins, director of the U.S. National Institutes of Health; Dr. Peter Marks, director of the Center for Biologics Evaluation and Research at the Food and Drug Administration, and; Dr. Debra Houry, director of the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Trump administration officials Dr. Scott Gottlieb and Dr. Amy Abernethy, both formerly at the FDA, are also taking part.

The CEOs of both Moderna and Pfizer, which developed competing coronavirus vaccines, will be speaking on separate panels on the first day of the conference. Fauci will effectively open the event that day, speaking after a welcoming statement from Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the culture council.

Fauci told NCR that he will encourage those taking part in the conference to recognize that responses to the continuing coronavirus pandemic and future health crises will require "a novel coordinated and collaborative global effort of scientists, industry, and community partners."

"We must work together to develop the diagnostics, treatments and vaccines that are urgently needed to relieve the pain, suffering and death that we are seeing all around us," he said.

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Paul Farmer, a co-founder of the non-profit healthcare organization Partners in Health, known for developing community-based treatment strategies in places across the world, will speak on the second day of the conference.

Farmer, who is also chair of Harvard Medical School's department of global health and social medicine, told NCR he thought the Vatican event would be a "special moment" for global healthcare issues because of the range of people taking part. He called the vaccines developed by Moderna and Pfizer, which use mRNA, as "entirely new technology."

"The guys and gals who have been working on that are taking part in this conference," said Farmer. "I'm not much of a conference guy. I do not get worked up about conferences. ... But I'm worked up about this."

Farmer, who has spoken in the past about being inspired by liberation theology to pursue his medical work, said he expects he will speak at the event about the need for equitable distribution of coronavirus vaccines.

"I imagine there will be a lot of discussion about vaccines," he said. "I'm happy to talk about the ways that we can reflect a commitment to full flowering ... by pushing forward a vaccine equity agenda."

Moderators for the three-day Vatican event include a number of popular American journalists, such as: Katie Couric, Meredith Vieira and Robin Roberts. Also taking part are doctors Sanjay Gupta and Mehmet Oz and Aerosmith guitarist Joe Perry.

The conference is the fifth on healthcare issues co-hosted by the Vatican's culture council. The first, which was focused on regenerative medicine and was held in 2016, included an address by then-Vice President Biden.

Biden, who focused on the Obama administration's "Moonshot" initiative on cancer research, spoke immediately before Pope Francis addressed that year's event. The future president spoke in the Vatican's Paul VI Hall, in the first such address of a U.S. official in the auditorium where the pope occasionally hosts his weekly audiences.



Pope Francis listens as Cardinal Gianfranco Ravasi, president of the Pontifical Council for Culture, speaks during an audience with people participating in the "United to Cure Conference" at the Vatican April 28, 2018. Hundreds of physicians, researchers and health-care executives attended the April 26-28, 2018, conference to talk about medical advances and steps to promote health care around the world. (CNS/Vatican Media)