SPONSORSHIP IN CATHOLIC HEALTH INITIATIVES

PASSING THE FLAME

2001
When ten congregations of women religious engaged in the dialog that led to the formation of Catholic Health Initiatives, they envisioned a new model of sponsorship to carry forward the Catholic health care ministry. Their vision focused on a shared model of sponsorship with equal participation by religious and lay members. This precedent-setting structure made Catholic Health Initiatives the first Catholic health system to give the laity a sponsorship role in its facilities.

The women religious and lay leaders who formed the steering council that created Catholic Health Initiatives depended on mutual trust and a pioneer spirit to guide them in the evolution of the new sponsorship model, which had no rules or conventions to follow. It was as if the steering council created an architectural design, but did not fill in the colors, shapes or arrangements. The council understood that those who would implement the new sponsorship model would need flexibility in order to make it a reality.

Now that Catholic Health Initiatives has completed its first five years of service, its women religious and lay leaders have a lived experience of what it means to truly share the sponsorship of this health care ministry. The Members, who represent the 12 congregations that participate in Catholic Health Initiatives, together with the Board of Stewardship Trustees, completed an 18-month discernment process in 2001 to articulate the reality of the Catholic Health Initiatives sponsorship model. With the help of facilitator David Nygren, CM, PhD, Corporate Governance Practice Leader at Mercer Delta Consulting, they clarified how this model shapes the roles, behaviors and activities of the lay and religious sponsors of Catholic Health Initiatives.

The discernment process enriched the Members’ and Board’s understanding of how the founding congregations, for many decades, had carefully tended the flame of sponsorship and then passed that flame to the Board of Stewardship Trustees for safekeeping. At the same time, the Members have transitioned their role to one of participation in and support of Catholic Health Initiatives, as well as one of influence on the organization’s mission.
PERSPECTIVES ON SPONSORSHIP
Sponsorship is the relationship within the Catholic Church that allows a juridic person to carry on the healing mission of Jesus. Sponsorship of an incorporated apostolic work involves both canonical and civil realities. The core elements of sponsorship are Fidelity, Integrity, Community and Stewardship.

Catholic Health Association

In general...sponsorship of Church ministry refers to the unique relationship of oversight, endorsement or support by a group that assumes to or commits to advancing the ministry of Jesus. Sponsorship is a call and a response to advance the love of God manifest in Jesus in a ministry of the Church. The response, born in profound trust and confidence in providence, implies the person or group entrusted with the ministry can attest to its worthiness. The sponsor is responsible for interpreting institutional fidelity to its founding intent and suggesting modification to its form or configuration to ensure its continued vitality, relevance to those served, and worthiness of public trust.

Sponsorship of Catholic Health Initiatives...the founding inspiration of Catholic Health Initiatives is the decision by ten congregations of women religious to partner with the laity advancing together previously independently inspired ministries. Congregations have historically used the word charism to describe the unique gift given to their foundress and passed on to members whereby they participate uniquely in the upbuilding of the Church. Coming together as a public juridic person (PJP) within the Roman Catholic Church they commit to advancing collectively the legacy of each congregation by healing the sick and advocating for the poor through Catholic Health Initiatives.

David Nygren, CM, PhD
Corporate Governance Practice Leader
Mercer Delta Consulting
ROLES

Religious Congregations Participating in Catholic Health Initiatives
The Congregations of Women Religious who either founded or later joined Catholic Health Initiatives. Each congregation chooses to be either Active or Honorary.

Catholic Health Initiatives Members
They are the Members of the civil corporation and each one represents one of the Active Congregations.

Sponsorship Trustee
Member of the Board of Stewardship Trustees, appointed by the Members of the civil corporation; as Sponsorship Trustee, she fulfills the canonical role, the appointment of all other members of the Board of Stewardship Trustees, as required for Catholic Health Initiatives by The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life in Rome.

Board of Stewardship Trustees
Board of the civil corporation, Catholic Health Initiatives, and as such governs the organization; members of the canonical corporation or public juridic person, Catholic Health Care Federation, and as such sponsor the market-based organizations.

Chief Executive Officer/President
Serves as informational resource for the Members, and facilitates the linkage between Members and the Board of Stewardship Trustees.

In their respective roles, the Members and the Board of Stewardship Trustees relate directly to one another.
LEARNINGS

The Board of Stewardship Trustees is the canonical sponsor of Catholic Health Initiatives and its public juridic person, Catholic Health Care Federation, in all of its ministries.

The Members of the civil corporation of Catholic Health Initiatives support and influence its mission and its public juridic person, Catholic Health Care Federation.
The Members of Catholic Health Initiatives influence through appointment, periodic dialogue and participation in key functions as they relate to the reserved powers. Influence is a matter of style and for Catholic Health Initiatives, the style is collegial.

Examples of key opportunities for influence by the Members within Catholic Health Initiatives:

- pro-active role in advocacy particularly in cooperation with Catholic Health Initiatives’ Advocacy Resource Group;
- participation by Members on Catholic Health Initiatives’ committees:
  - Advocacy Advisory Committee
  - Mission and Ministry Fund Advisory Committee
  - Healthy Communities Task Force
  - Direct Community Investment Program
  - other opportunities mutually identified by the Members and Board
It is important that Catholic Health Initiatives stays connected with the legacy of the founding congregations; therefore:

- it is an expectation that a senior vice president of operations will notify the former sponsoring congregation’s Member when there is a major change in leadership at one of the congregation’s former facilities.

- it is the responsibility of the director of mission services at the market-based organization to arrange for the orientation of a new chief executive officer to the legacy and tradition of the founding congregation. This orientation might take the form of a visit with the congregational leadership, discussion with a member of the congregation, presentation of materials prepared by the founding congregation, etc. It is the founding congregation’s responsibility to determine the approach it wishes to take for this orientation of a new chief executive officer to the congregation.

Opportunities for the nurturing of the Board and the Members and for relationship building between the Members and the Board:

- annual joint meeting – reflecting together for a half day on key issues (i.e. annual report to The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life)

- annual joint retreat
  - representatives from both the Members and Board of Stewardship Trustees will plan retreat
  - the day will include prayer time, reflection and discussion of relevant issues
  - issues discussed could be religious, related to social justice or health care, the Catholic Health Initiatives core values, core elements of sponsorship, etc.

- planned rituals together

- planned meals together

- attendance at the biannual National Leadership Conference for additional interaction possibilities

- other opportunities mutually identified by the Members and Board

The Members and Board of Stewardship Trustees of Catholic Health Initiatives will continue to review and reflect on the issue of sponsorship every three years.