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Introduction

Welcome to the 13th edition of Sacred Stories, Catholic Health Initiatives’ annual collection of stories written by employees, volunteers, board members, physicians and other members of the CHI family about grace-filled moments of lived spirituality in our environment of care.

We invite you to read and enjoy these stories, but also to use them. Each story is preceded by a brief preface of sacred text and followed by questions for reflection. When combined, these elements can help expand our awareness and understanding of the importance of spirituality in our workplace.

Through the years, our sacred stories have been used for personal reading; to begin each day with a reminder of our mission and vision; or to begin a meeting with a shared reflection. If you find other ways that Sacred Stories is helpful to you, please let us know.
Foreword

Catholic Health Initiatives recently reaffirmed the attributes that define our distinctive culture and exemplify our core values of Reverence, Integrity, Compassion and Excellence. As we read through the stories in this 13th edition of Sacred Stories, we marveled at how well they express several of our cultural attributes.

- **Hospitality:** Our culture is one in which a diversity of people and points of view are welcomed, respected and celebrated.
- **Humility:** Our culture is characterized by service, exemplified by servant leaders called to understand and serve the greater good.
- **Healing Environment:** Our culture is sensitive to the needs of others, thus helping to create an environment of empathy, forgiveness and healing.
- **Innovation:** Our culture is characterized by courage to challenge assumptions and develop potential in order to continually transform.

The stories in this volume reflect the authors’ respect for diverse points of view as they care for people from many different backgrounds and experiences. They reflect a deeply felt responsibility to act as servant leaders and guardians of the common good. They describe the environment of healing created in each of our facilities. And, they show the courage of our employees as they challenge their own and others’ assumptions about the best way to care for patients, communities, and colleagues. This courage comes from the knowledge that God is among us, using our hands, minds and hearts to deliver healing when possible, and to provide comfort in all cases.

We are very proud of and moved by how fully the people of CHI demonstrate our core values and create a culture built on them, as captured in these wonderful sacred stories. We hope you will find inspiration here.

Kevin E. Lofton, FACHE
President and Chief Executive Officer

Thomas R. Kopfensteiner, STD
Senior Vice President, Mission
Suggested Sacred Text

So he said, “I am, as Isaiah prophesied: A voice of one that cries in the desert: prepare a way for the Lord. Make his path straight.” — John 1:23

Sacred Story

Several years ago, New Mexico’s Catholic Bishops and many advocates and political leaders joined together to abolish a regressive and punitive tax on food in our state. At the time, New Mexico was one of only three states in the nation to tax food, one of the most basic necessities of life. Though there was some initial opposition, a consensus emerged that this was the right thing to do for New Mexico.

However, within a few years the economic climate changed dramatically and our governor, legislature and business leaders were desperately looking for new revenue. The governor and legislature agreed to reinstate the tax on basic foods. One state senator repeatedly stated that everyone must “share the pain” during tough economic times.

St. Joseph Community Health and the faith community stood largely alone in opposing this tax. One day, after being scolded by one of our traditional allies, we took a lunch break to reassess our opposition to the tax.

During lunch, I talked with our advocacy liaison, Miguel. We both admired the late Archbishop of El Salvador, Oscar Romero, who was killed at the altar mainly for speaking out on behalf of the poor and needy. If Archbishop Romero was willing to sacrifice his life in defense of the poor, we concluded that we could handle harsh words from legislators and even from friends.

We left the restaurant having renewed our faith and commitment. As we walked to our car, I spotted a nickel in the parking lot and picked it up, saying that it was a message from God to keep speaking on behalf of the poor. Miguel jokingly said, “Maybe we should speak a little louder,” as it was only a nickel. A few steps later, Miguel found a five-dollar bill on the ground.

When Miguel showed it to me, I thought he was playing a joke. Then, I took a closer look and saw tire tracks on the bill. That, combined with Miguel’s sincerity, made me realize it was not a joke. We returned to the legislature with a renewed sense of justice and hope.
Later that night, the legislature passed a new food tax. However, through steadfast faith and solidarity with our allies, we were ultimately able to convince the governor to veto the legislation.

To this day, I believe God was speaking to us and provided us with a sign to keep working on behalf of the poor. I hope I always remember the lesson that God revealed to me in this story, which we affectionately call “The Nickel Story.”

**Allen Sánchez**
St. Joseph Community Health
Albuquerque, New Mexico

**Question for Reflection**

*How can you be an advocate or voice for someone in need?*

**“Through steadfast faith and solidarity with our allies, we were ultimately able to convince the governor to veto the legislation.”**
My Visit with June

Suggested Sacred Text

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: A time to be born and a time to die.
— Ecclesiastes 3:1–2

Sacred Story

June was a lovely lady with short white hair. She was sitting in a chair eating a late lunch when I came into her room to visit with her. June told me she’d spent most of her life in Massachusetts, but had lived in Florida for about 15 years before coming to Washington to live with her daughter-in-law. That was a very nice arrangement, but now, due to some health issues, June thought an assisted living situation would be better for her. After all, she said, “I’m 85 and a half years old now!”

June told me that she had been raised in the Episcopal Church and had enjoyed a deep and sincere faith since early childhood. Then, without missing a beat, she announced that she was ready to die. She wanted to “go home” to our Lord and was a bit miffed because when she told Him to send her a ticket, He didn’t!

I suggested that perhaps the ticket had been sent, but we didn’t know if it had been sent by air-mail or pony express. She paused to think about that, but then told me she’s wasn’t afraid to die and wanted to get on with it.

Joseph, a nursing assistant, came in to take June’s vital signs. I told June that Joseph is a singer. He said he would sing June a song, one that he’d just learned, “Steal Away.” The lyrics were about going home to Jesus. Joseph sang three verses of this old spiritual. While he sang, June sat with a rapt expression on her face. I don’t think she blinked her eyes once. When Joseph finished, June had a beautiful, big smile on her face. She thanked Joseph over and over.

After he left, she told me how down she had been feeling and how much better she felt now. She leaned toward me, lowered her voice to a conspiratorial whisper and said, ”What I’ve learned today is that I need to be patient.”
“What I’ve learned today is that I need to be patient.”

I am truly privileged to work in a place where I not only see how colleagues like Joseph respond generously to opportunities to serve, but also witness the actions of the Spirit in the lives of people like June.

Ann Lund
Saint Anthony Hospital
Gig Harbor, Washington

Questions for Reflection

How is God calling you to use your gifts and abilities to serve those who enter our healing ministry?
Suggested Sacred Text

Moses said to the Lord, “You have been telling me, ‘Lead these people,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.” The Lord replied, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” — Exodus 33:12-14

Sacred Story

I first met Roger one morning when I was working at St. Camillus Place, and found out that he was not a morning person! He refused to get out of bed, and various tactics had to be employed to get him up. I felt a connection with him, and was determined to win him over.

One of my fondest memories of Roger involved a time when he became ill during a vacation, and I cared for him. He was feeling better on the way home, so we stopped for lunch. We sat in a booth and he began inching closer to me. He turned, crossed his legs on the bench, and held my hand — like he used to do at his father’s annual visits. At that moment, I knew a connection was established.

Soon after, I graduated from college with a degree and a dilemma. My life plan had been to be an elementary school teacher, but I felt a deep calling to stay at St. Camillus Place, so I did.

Roger’s health gradually deteriorated. Toward the end of his life, he spent many hours in my office while I worked. I could feel Roger letting go. He was “ready,” and I thought I was, too. When I received a call one night notifying me that Roger had died, my mind was ready, but the deep loss I felt indicated my heart was not. I was in mourning.

One day while I was on vacation, sitting in a lounge chair, a monarch butterfly landed on my arm. I thought nothing of it. Later that week, while I was in the bow of a boat and feeling down, another monarch appeared, flapping its wings swiftly to flutter before my eyes. I finally recognized the butterflies as signs from Roger. I knew he was okay, and God was telling me that my choice to stay with Roger and St. Camillus Place was what I had been called to do.
God used Roger to teach me valuable life lessons:

- Words aren’t necessary to figure out another person’s needs.
- We’re all equals in the human experience.
- Relationships are worth the effort. Perseverance, trust, and service to others produce true happiness.
- Look creatively for solutions. They may be fluttering right in front of you.

Some people float through life wondering what their purpose is, but I believe God has a plan. Roger was part of my life’s plan. We often focus on how we can help those in need, but if we are open to it, we may learn something from them. Roger was meant to guide me to work with people with developmental disabilities.

Barb Miller
St. Camillus Place
Little Falls, Minnesota

Questions for Reflection

Through what person or through what part of creation has God’s presence been revealed to you today?

Reflecting on what gives you a sense of meaning and purpose, how is God calling you to serve others at this time in your life?

Look creatively for solutions.
Including God in my Daily Rounds

Suggested Sacred Text

The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. — Philippians 4:5-7

Sacred Story

One part of my work is to do regular rounds, checking in with staff members and keeping in touch with what’s happening throughout the hospital.

As I do my rounds, I pass through most parts of the hospital. During my first two years here, I would pass by the chapel almost daily. It is a quiet and lovely place, but I had entered it only for feast days and prayer services.

In the spring of 2011, we were in yet another battle with the nearby river and record amounts of floodwater. We had risks to analyze and decisions to make. As we listened to the latest reports, analyzed data and discussed our plans, I continued my rounds.

On one of those days, when I came to the chapel, I walked in and sat down. Within moments, I felt a wave of calm wash over me, which brought to mind “the peace that passes understanding.” At that moment, I was reminded that I needed to include God in our coping with this crisis. I had been working hard to help my team deal with the situation, but I had been leaving the One who holds us with His strong hands on the sidelines.

We safely moved our inpatients to other facilities, staged an alternative emergency department site on higher ground, continued our outpatient services, and lived within a sand dike, with the high water our ever-present next door neighbor. I continued to include God in my daily rounds. The tranquility was nurturing and reminded me who was really in charge.
Now that our lives have returned to normal, I still include God in my daily rounds. This brief stop doesn’t take more than a few moments and is a good reminder of the need to incorporate our faith and relationship with our God in all we do. My relationship with my coworkers is something I cherish and work to nurture; God is also an important and cherished coworker.

**Camille Settelmeyer, RN**  
Mercy Hospital  
Valley City, North Dakota

*Questions for Reflection*

How might you incorporate a “brief stop” with God into your daily routines?

How have you experienced God as your coworker?

“I continued to include God in my daily rounds. The tranquility was nurturing and reminded me who was really in charge.”
**Suggested Sacred Text**

*We know that all things work for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*

— Romans 8:28

**Sacred Story**

Good things come in gigantic packages. New diagnostic and surgical equipment shows up in big crates, on big trucks. The staff gets as excited as kids at Christmas, wanting to unpack and set up the new equipment right away. However, it’s much more complicated than taking a new toy out of the box and turning it on. The equipment has to be set up, cleaned and tested, and the staff must be trained to operate it.

The final phase before putting a new machine into daily operation is to practice with it. When a new ultrasound machine was ready for its final practice run, the radiology staff went looking for volunteers to act as mock patients. They knocked on the door of the Facilities Department as we sat around a table for a meeting. They offered a free ultrasound on the kidneys and abdomen. “It doesn’t hurt,” they said. “It’s non-invasive and gives you a glimpse of how healthy your kidneys are. Why not do it?” One after another, people signed up. But my good friend, Joe, said, “No thanks.”

I’m not a pushy guy, but something inside was nagging at me. Something told me to get Joe to sign up for this opportunity. I pestered him. Finally he said yes, but by then all the practice slots were taken. Still, the radiology staff agreed to squeeze him in as the last patient on the last day.

On most people, the radiology staff tested the ultrasound machine’s abdominal and kidney settings. But, just by chance, they decided to test the carotid artery settings when it was Joe’s turn. They saw a mass on his thyroid.

Joe had a very rare form of cancer in his thyroid. Because it was caught early, his surgeon was able to remove all of the cancer and give him an excellent prognosis.
Was it just a coincidence? One of our chaplains summed it up beautifully when she quoted, “A coincidence is a small miracle in which God chooses to remain anonymous.” Although God may remain anonymous, we are given the awesome opportunity to enter into the mystery of circumstance almost daily in health care. In seizing that opportunity, I have no doubt God is present in our nagging feelings, halls, ultrasound department, and employees.

Chris Valentine
Penrose–St. Francis Health Services
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Question for Reflection

How often do you call to mind the presence of God as you go about your daily responsibilities?

“A coincidence is a small miracle in which God chooses to remain anonymous.”
Sacred Story

I came to work in the emergency department at 6 a.m. to the news that a semi-trailer truck had collided with a recreational vehicle on Interstate 80. Both vehicles were total losses, and there would be multiple patients.

The family in the RV included a husband and wife, their two teenage children, and the wife’s sister and brother-in-law. The son had head injuries that required immediate neurosurgery; the wife had multiple orthopedic injuries also requiring surgery; and the daughter required inpatient observation. The husband and his in-laws had bumps and bruises.

When the husband arrived, I updated him and then hugged him. As you might imagine, he and his in-laws were dazed, unable to process all that was happening and all that had so instantly changed in their world. A nurse brought them new T-shirts to change into. One of Good Samaritan’s sisters came to pray with them and give them a key to a hotel room where they could clean up.

In the early afternoon, the wife’s sister and her husband came by the emergency department. As we talked, they freely shed tears. They felt blessed that the accident had brought them to Good Samaritan Hospital.

They said that one of the paramedics gave them all the money in his pocket — $100 — for things they might need. The paramedics also made a second two-hour round trip to the accident scene to gather any personal belongings they could find for the family. When the couple went to the Good Samaritan cafeteria for lunch, a hospital employee paid for their meal, then disappeared. Later, I talked with the father, who said several employees had offered him their car keys so that he would have a car.
That day left me in awe of the people I work with. I was born in the nearby town of Holdrege, but had only come to Kearney and Good Samaritan several months earlier. The outpouring of caring seemed endless. Like the family, I continually found tears in my eyes, blessed to witness this genuine caring.

I thought about how God used these people — these Good Samaritans — to help the strangers on the road, but I had difficulty grasping the magnitude of the grace I witnessed. It was not until later, when I told the story to my best friend, that I realized the real majesty of that day. More amazing than what Good Samaritan’s people did for the family was that they considered what they did to be normal — nothing extraordinary. They were simply being real Christians, like the biblical Good Samaritan, quietly living their values.

Craig L. Bosley, MD
Good Samaritan Hospital
Kearney, Nebraska

Question for Reflection

How are you like the biblical Good Samaritan in what you do?

They considered what they did to be normal — nothing extraordinary.
Stringed Release

Suggested Sacred Text

And the king will say to them in reply, “Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.”
— Matthew 25:40

Sacred Story

Today was going to be a good day. The patient was on the road to recovery and felt fine as he looked out the window, the skies filled with the promise he felt in his heart.

Without warning, his hopes shattered. Something was terribly wrong in his body, and he didn’t understand. Doctors were at work, but it was an irreversible problem that couldn’t be stopped. Not only would he not live through the day, he would likely not survive another 60 minutes.

Family members dashed into the patient’s room to say their goodbyes. The chaplain came to offer support. The patient could barely speak, but his brother relayed a message to the chaplain: “Please, find a guitar player. My brother loves the guitar and if he’s going to die, he wants to die to the sound of a guitar.”

The doctor told the chaplain to hurry. The man had very little time.

I’m a maintenance man at the hospital. I fix things for a living. But, in my spare time, I play the guitar, and I play in the band at my church.

I saw the chaplain hurrying toward me. He asked me to bring my guitar and play for a dying man I had never met. I looked at him as if he was out of his mind. “I’ll find you a good guitar player,” I offered.

“It’ll be too late; this man is dying now,” the chaplain replied.

I heard a passage from Matthew inside my head: “Truly I say to you, inasmuch as you have done it to one of the least of these my brothers, you have done it to me.” With the conviction of the Lord upon my heart, I agreed to play.
I got my guitar, which I keep at the hospital because I stop in the chapel before work to play. It’s my way of honoring the Lord.

I went to the patient’s room. I didn’t even know his name. I played, “Came to My Rescue,” and then, “Draw Me Close,” and the man passed away.

The family thanked me and said, “He waited for you.” They said he refused to die until the guitar player came. Until this point, I thought I was to use my skills here as a maintenance man. God called on me to use the musical talents he gave me to help someone else. I now know he wants me to use all of my talents. It was one of the greatest gifts I have received.

**Daniel Cisneros**

*Penrose-St. Francis Health Services*

*Colorado Springs, Colorado*

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Questions for Reflection

*Can you think of a time when you were called upon to do something outside the parameters of your job description? Did you hesitate or did you answer the call? What did you learn from that experience? Are you using all of your talents?*

“Please, find a guitar player. My brother loves the guitar and if he’s going to die, he wants to die to the sound of a guitar.”
Suggested Sacred Text

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*
— Matthew 5:8

Sacred Story

Most of the time, I don’t understand what she does. There are tubes, techniques and timings, and I watch in awe. The procedures are scientific, yet bodies are so mysterious. With caring hands, she points bodies toward healing, and I see Christ at work.

Like Christ, she not only heals through her touch but through her words. She goes out and finds Christ’s sheep. One day, when a chaplain could not get there in time and a patient’s son was in desperate grief, she used her healing hands to pray with him. She helps the lost find peaceful rest in the comfort of the Lord. Her words speak the truth in love. She helps families know how critical their loved one is, and carefully explains the decisions they need to make. When no one else can, she finds the words to help them touch the end of Christ’s garment.

She is a servant leader. As charge nurse in critical care, she directs, double-checks and guides not only the patients and their families, but fellow staff. In the hospital, a land of always something new, she leads her people, keeping her eyes on God. I know she is constantly doing her best for the patients, for the hospital she serves, and for Christ, whom she serves first. Her leadership allows the staff to trust her, count on her and follow her.

In reflecting on what she does, I am reminded of a poem I once read about a child thanking her mother for all the things she taught her when the mother thought the child wasn’t looking. The mother was simply doing what she ordinarily did, but through her action and modeling the child learned and was encouraged.

As a chaplain, I have not only been enriched by knowing her and watching her ministry, I have learned and been encouraged in my ministry. There is laughter, friendship, and passion for Christ’s work. Her joy exudes as one who lives life as a servant in worship.
“She helps the lost find peaceful rest in the comfort of the Lord. Her words speak the truth in love.”

The nurse’s life and work speak to the mystery of God and his gifts. May her hands always extend the healing ministry of Christ, and may Christ bless her to always remember those gifts.

**Katy Schneider Halliburton**  
Penrose-St. Francis Health Services  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

**Questions for Reflection**

*Is there someone in your life that you have observed as the author of this story observed the nurse? What did you learn from that person and how has it influenced your life?*

*Are there people watching you? What are they learning from you?*
A Lesson in Humility

Suggested Sacred Text
You have been told...what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: Only to do right and to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God. – Micah 6:8

Sacred Story

When I became vice president of healthy communities at CHI, I knew that an important part of my job would be supporting our international ministry partnerships. I made my first trip to visit one of those partnerships with the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. The congregation is active in Belize, working with Hand in Hand Ministries to care for children and families affected by HIV/AIDS and to build modest homes. Sister Luke, our leader, welcomed me and agreed to teach me to conduct immersion experiences.

We prepared by reading about Belize and about the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth and their commitment to international ministries. We also reviewed theological documents about common good and global solidarity. I understood — or so I thought.

In Belize, we would build a house with and for Sandra. She had saved for a long time to pay for a tiny plot of land.

Building the very modest house would be done by hand. The house would have a floor, four walls, a roof, a few windows and a door, all resting on concrete cinder blocks. There was no plumbing. Electricity would be provided through extension cord connections to an outside power source several houses away.

First, we needed to mix concrete to set the cinder blocks: by hand, with shovels. I tried to mix, but did not have the strength to stay at it very long. As the cement hardened a bit, I could hardly even stir. My teammates were supportive and compassionate.

Next, we unloaded wood from trucks and carried it to the back of the lot where we would build the house. We began to nail the boards together. I had never hammered anything other than a picture holder on a wall. Several teammates tried to teach me to hammer, but I didn’t get it. Every nail I hit crooked had to be taken out and redone by someone else. I was not only unable to help, I was in the way — a detriment to the effort.

For the next two days, I brought water to my teammates, delivered nails and swept the floor. I also talked to Sandra’s children and neighbors and learned
about their lives and their deep faith. I learned how challenging their lives were. Getting clean water, preparing food and doing laundry was arduous, physical labor. Yet, everyone joined together in the community. The children were happy and went to school, eager to learn. Their lives were God-centered and their faith and spirituality were part of their language and interactions.

On the third day, the team was ready to paint. I had never done that before, either. I was not helpful, although I was entertaining when I tripped over a bench and landed on my back with aqua blue paint all over me. I was supposed to be learning how to lead these experiences and I was not even able to be a valuable contributor. What was God saying to me?

Sister Luke helped me reflect on my quandary. I was supposed to be learning how to be with those who are less materially fortunate: to listen, to understand and to help with their needs and learn from their gifts. What I thought I had to “contribute” proved to be naive and arrogant. I was humbled by the emotional and spiritual strength of those I was supposed to be helping. I believe God was showing me that I had a very narrow view of life and a great deal to learn.

I had talked of meeting people “where they are” or responding to peoples’ needs “as they define them.” Now, I had a real sense of the meaning of those words. I was learning to be a mission leader, but I had just begun to learn.

The team finished building Sandra’s house. The house blessing touched a new part of my heart and soul.

The lessons learned from my first international ministry experience were life and soul changing. We have much to learn from our brothers and sisters next door and around the world. To understand what it means to be brothers and sisters in God’s family, I needed to step out of my sense of self to see life through the eyes of others and experience God with their faith.

Diane Jones  
Catholic Health Initiatives National Office  
Denver, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

In the midst of the demands of hectic daily schedules, what is God truly calling you to do and to be? How can you take the time to pause and see God in others and in yourself?

How can you be in solidarity with those less materially fortunate?
Suggested Sacred Text

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. — John 13:34

Sacred Story

There is no way to write love into a job description, and no one gets paid extra if they add that component to their work. While we don’t often talk about it in our work setting, love might be one of the most appropriate words to describe what we do each day.

The Tuesday after a big snowfall in Chattanooga, I arrived at work to find that many staff and visitors had spent the night and probably had not rested as well as they would have at home. I decided to make rounds and see how everyone was getting along.

I came upon two women in a hallway and began a conversation with them, asking if they had family or friends who were patients and how they were doing.

One of the women began to tell me about their loved one who was a patient in the hospital. Then, she noticed my name tag and took a closer look. She gave me a hug and said, “Oh, thank you. This is such a beautiful place and everyone is so wonderful. There is so much love all around here. I have never felt so much love before.”

Her reaction and her words touched my heart deeply. They caused me to recall God’s command in scripture to love one another. Her words not only warmed my heart but strengthened my commitment to the Catholic health ministry. The “thank you” was really meant for the staff this family encountered each day they spent at Memorial.

Each day, I thank God for our caring, loving staff and volunteers who live this command to love one another on a daily basis. I am convinced that the love “all around here” is a healing force among and between colleagues, caregivers, patients and their families.

Eileen Wrobleski, CSC
Memorial Health Care System
Chattanooga, Tennessee
“This is such a beautiful place and everyone is so wonderful. There is so much love all around here. I have never felt so much love before.”

Question for Reflection

Christ shared a new commandment with his disciples: “that you love one another; even as I have loved you.” How do you demonstrate God’s love in how you respond to patients, their families, fellow associates or other customers?
**Suggested Sacred Text**

*I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work in you will continue to complete it until the day of Christ Jesus.* — Philippians 1:6

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**Sacred Story**

It is always a journey when an organization’s culture starts to form. As a young organization of only 15 years, CHI’s culture was originally formed by the presence of women religious. But, as we grow and as we transition to more lay leaders, one might wonder how CHI is doing.

As a seven year “veteran” of CHI, I can say that this past year felt more like we are hitting our stride in living our values than any year prior. The cultural attributes formed from our Core Values — Reverence, Integrity, Compassion, Excellence — can be seen in many ways. This base of collaboration and common good is heartwarming and will sustain us as we move into the “new normal” that our strategic plan is preparing us for.

- One Care, our major investment in electronic health records, helps to reinforce CHI’s Core Values. As clinical standards teams come together, team members see how alike their work is — regardless of where they do that work within CHI — and these new relationships support accomplishments that help us provide the very best possible care to every person we serve.

- The special spirit of CHI has been noticed by some of our newer employees during the past year. One said that our use of reflections to start meetings is meaningful. Another noted the advanced nature of our new governance structures. Most importantly, new colleagues view the results of our access improvement and care improvement strategies — like telehealth, oncology clinical trials participation, and virtual nurse coaching — as innovative.

- I have also had the opportunity to be coached by one of the women religious who helps lead one of our market-based organizations. This took place through a new mentoring program that is bringing together market-based and national leaders, seasoned leaders and new leaders, and leaders from different functions. It provides everyone involved with a chance to grow and form a new appreciation for what is going on across CHI.
It is interactions like these, as well as formal programs like Staff Renewal Days or volunteering with Project Cure, that help me realize God is present in our working lives here at CHI. This helps me know that I made the right choice of employer. I chose CHI because a recruiter assured me, “They have values.” Now, as an employee, I can assure others that CHI’s Core Values are not just words on a piece of paper. They are truly visible, as it says in the CHI prayer, “in our every interaction on this Emmaus journey together.”

Evon Holladay  
Catholic Health Initiatives National Office  
Denver, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

What good work do you experience unfolding in your role at CHI? How will it be brought to completion? How do you participate in this effort?

“As a seven year ‘veteran’ of CHI, I can say that this past year felt more like we are hitting our stride in living our values than any year prior.”
**We Walk by Faith and Not by Sight**

*Suggested Sacred Text*

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.* — Romans 15:13

*Sacred Story*

Looking from the outside in, working in a hospice can be a difficult and depressing job. But for those of us inside, it is not only a rich and rewarding privilege but a sacred honor to walk with patients and their loved ones during the precious final days here on earth. It is especially sacred when one of the persons we are caring for has not even breathed their first breath yet.

Early in 2011, St. Catherine Hospice received a call from a local physician asking for prenatal/perinatal hospice services for a local family, beginning a walk of faith.

Jim and Carolyn had been surprised but excited to learn a baby was on the way so early in their marriage. Then, they were surprised and afraid as they learned the baby had problems. The baby was diagnosed with Potter’s Syndrome, almost certain to result in very early infant death. Jim and Carolyn made an unwavering decision not to terminate the pregnancy, but to keep the hope that they would one day be able to hold their child, even just for a minute, and let the child know he or she was always loved and wanted.

Five hospice staff members committed to being available for this family at all times. We all fell in love with this devoted Christian couple, who were willing to bear the pain of loss to save a moment of love for their child.

Doctors monitored the baby’s progress — it was a girl. Jim and Carolyn shared ideas with the hospice staff as they picked out a name for the baby: Gabrielle Marie. The couple asked for a small crucifix necklace for Gabrielle to wear in her casket.

Late in March, the doctors studied Carolyn’s sonogram and saw major changes. Gabrielle’s kidneys were starting to develop. In early April, things changed dramatically. Carolyn was hospitalized due to a decrease in Gabrielle’s movement. Suddenly, the doctors determined they needed to take the baby right away.
On Easter Sunday morning, Gabrielle Marie was born — alive, beautiful and with a good chance of survival. She did not have Potter’s Syndrome, but had contracted a virus in utero. She will still have some challenges, but her life will be good. The hospice staff presented the tiny crucifix necklace to Gabrielle, to be worn in life.

Gabrielle is a gifted child. She is gifted with two parents who treasured and guarded her life; a doctor who supported them in their precious choice; support from a church family; and a God who creates only life. St. Catherine Hospice was gifted with traveling on this family’s journey, walking together “by faith, not by sight,” and to witness our little patient taking her first breath of life on Easter Sunday.

Glenda Patterson, LBSW
St. Catherine Hospice
Garden City, Kansas

Questions for Reflection

When have you walked by faith and not by sight?

When have you witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit?

“We all fell in love with this devoted Christian couple, who were willing to bear the pain of loss to save a moment of love for their child.”
Does Anyone Have an Ark?

Suggested Sacred Text

My brothers and sisters, what good is it to profess faith without practicing it? Such faith has no power to save one, has it? If a brother or sister has nothing to wear and no food for the day, and you say to them, “Good-by and good luck! Keep warm and well fed,” but do not meet their bodily needs, what good is that? So it is with the faith that does nothing in practice. It is thoroughly lifeless. James 2:14–17

Sacred Story

When I began my job as chief development officer for Saint Clare’s Foundation, I never imagined arriving to work in the bed of a National Guard truck. But, a few months after my arrival, the region served by Saint Clare’s Health Services was struck by Hurricane Irene. It was the first storm of that magnitude to make landfall in New Jersey in 108 years. It caused major flooding, downed trees and massive power outages.

Our response to the hurricane was immediate. Staff and volunteers arrived quickly when the intensity of the storm became apparent. Although we had to close our Sussex facility temporarily and our main campus in Denville became an island surrounded by a lake, our Dover campus maintained the only operational emergency department in a county of 500,000 people. An auditorium became a shelter for evacuees and many of our own staff members; a baby was delivered during the height of the storm; and our staff treated many major injuries that occurred during the crisis. In fact, there are countless stories of the compassion with which our staff treated the patients entrusted to our care.

All of this was possible because of the wonderful people who are Saint Clare’s. This includes a nurse who used a kayak to reach the hospital; our CEO, seasoned by Hurricane Katrina six years earlier, who instantly set up command centers; and auxiliary members who came in to “do whatever is needed.”

CHI’s leadership orientation shares a ministerial history of hospitality, citing the safe havens that ancient monasteries provided to those who sought care and refuge. I found that same spirit in the back of a National Guard truck as I shared a ride with a physician, nurses and surgical technicians. The diesel engine rattled to a start and we headed off to forge a river that had appeared overnight, ready to make Saint Clare’s a safe haven in Morris County, New Jersey for those seeking care and refuge.

Jeff Lamie
Saint Clare’s Foundation
Denville, New Jersey
“All of this was possible because of the wonderful people who are Saint Clare’s. This includes a nurse who used a kayak to reach the hospital.”

Questions for Reflection

Name the one thing that makes you proudest to be part of your facility. Why?

Do you have any islands in your own life?
Making a Difference

Suggested Sacred Text

*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* – 2 Timothy 4:7

Sacred Story

I have worked in home care for more than 20 years. However, because I work in the office rather than as a caregiver, I can lose sight of the difference our care makes in the lives of those we serve. But now, I have a vivid, beautiful reminder to pull out when I need it.

One day, as I talked with one of our physical therapists, she told me about Mary Ellan. Mary Ellan was 81 years old and had multiple medical conditions, including a below-the-knee amputation, rheumatoid arthritis and multiple wounds. For three years, she had not been able to walk: due to severe knee contractures, she could not fully straighten her legs or put any weight on her left leg. Yet, in spite of all she faced, she told our therapist, “I want to walk again. I’ve been walking all my life and see no reason to stop now!”

As the nursing and therapy team worked with Mary Ellan, despite the pain and discomfort, she always had a positive attitude. She frequently told her therapist, “If this will make me walk, keep going!” Mary Ellan worked hard, and four years after becoming wheelchair-bound, she took her first steps. When I heard this, I felt shivers!

We invited Mary Ellan to our company management meeting. We told the managers about her as she was wheeled to the front of the room. As everyone watched, she slowly rocked a few times, then stood. We held our collective breath. Then, as Mary Ellan took a step, the room erupted with shouts and applause! Tears streamed down many faces as we witnessed the power of a determined spirit and a dedicated team of caregivers.

Mary Ellan continues to possess the spirit and determination of an Olympic athlete. She can walk to her front door to greet visitors to her home. She can walk, with the help of her rolling walker, around her apartment and onto the patio. Mary Ellan says she has gotten her life back.
Mary Ellan worked hard, and four years after becoming wheelchair-bound, she took her first steps.

Reflecting on this experience helps give perspective to the challenges I face in my work. Mary Ellan’s determination continues to inspire my own determination to sustain this ministry of care. She continues to inspire me. Now and then, I look at pictures from the management meeting. I see Mary Ellan’s face glowing with excitement as she stood and walked. Then, I am reminded of why we do what we do, and the difference we can make in the lives of those who need us.

**Jackie Dukes**  
Consolidated Health Services  
Milford, Ohio

Questions for Reflection

What challenges do you face that draw upon your faithfulness and perseverance? How might others assist you in “running” the race before you?

How are you inspired by this story? Can you recall a time when you manifested spirit and determination to overcome an obstacle?
Sacred Story

The Sacrament of the Sick reminds us to pray for doctors, nurses and other people who care for us. But, we can be so preoccupied when receiving medical care that we do not attend to the spirituality that motivates our caregivers.

Many in health care do their work in response to a call planted deeply within their hearts. As a sacramental minister, I have seen this through the warm greetings I receive from caregivers and patients at Jewish Hospital, and in the words of scripture.

“The Lord bindeth up the heart of his people and healeth the bruise of their wounds.” This text is boldly presented in Hebrew and English in a captivating mosaic created by Dr. Harold Berg, a respected surgeon and professor. The mosaic, with portraits of medieval doctors at work, welcomes all who enter Jewish Hospital. It captures the spirit of the hospital’s founding in 1905 and the spirit that permeates Louisville’s medical community — providing care supported by prayer. I’m sure this spirit was felt by Dr. Berg’s patients, for his surgery was guided by an Abraham-like faith.

Fortunately, he was not alone. Many doctors and nurses pray for their patients daily.

One afternoon, I anointed a patient and was about to say the closing prayer when his doctor came into the room. “We are almost finished with our prayer,” I told the doctor. “Please, let me join you,” he said. When our prayer was complete he told the patient, “You have not only my prayer, but the prayer of my wife and daughter. Every night when we pray at my daughter’s bedside, she adds a special prayer that ‘all those dad will be operating on tomorrow will be healthy and get well quickly.’”

Then the doctor stepped back, and his demeanor changed. “We need to go over your test results and discuss our plan for tomorrow’s surgery.” His personality shift was not because he was a cold person, but because to serve God and the patient in the best way, he needed mastery of the details.

We should presume that the medical personnel caring for us do so from a deep motivation. Even if they do not seem sensitive to the spiritual, we can pray for them and be assured that the ultimate caregiver is the Lord who “bindeth up the heart of his people and healeth the bruise of their wounds.”

Father Joe Merkt
Jewish Hospital
Louisville, Kentucky
Questions for Reflection

What strikes you in this story?

What are the characteristics of the servant leader evident in this story?

“The Lord bindeth up the heart of his people and healeth the bruise of their wounds.”
What are You Doing for the Rest of Your Life?

Suggested Sacred Text

When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.”

Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat.”

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish,” they answered.

“Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. – Matthew 14:14–22

Sacred Story

These days, I’m a certified nursing assistant at St. Anthony Hospital in Gig Harbor, Washington. But, I’ve been a singer all my life. When I think about it, singing has brought me life since I was a little boy and sang with my seven brothers. My father was the one who encouraged the gift. I’m so used to singing and scatting as I go through my day, I don’t think too much about it.

A few months ago, a patient named Julia came to the floor where I work. She was a slight, quiet woman. We chatted a bit as I settled her in her room. I guess I must have carried a tune or two while I was working. She was conscious of it, at least, because she remembered it.

Three days after she arrived, Julia was my patient again. She told me, “You’re always so cheerful. I love to hear you sing.” I was called away to another patient, but I promised I’d return to sing a song for Julia.
“I did not understand that God was using my gifts to speak His love to them and provide a final affirmation of their love for each other.”

When I returned, Julia’s husband was in the room with her. Julia asked me to sing whatever song came to me. I love old spirituals, so I sang, “Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen.” Tears came to their eyes. They asked for another song, and I sang, “What are You Doing for the Rest of Your Life?” Julia and her husband held hands and looked deeply into each other’s eyes. I slipped out of the room.

When I came to work the next day, the charge nurse asked me to go see Julia. Again, her husband was with her. Stuttering as she spoke, Julia asked if I would sing, “When the Saints Go Marching In” at her memorial service. I was shocked, but managed to say yes. Julia died two weeks later.

I knew that Julia was terminally ill, but there were so many other things I did not know. I did not know that the spiritual I sang was a favorite of her husband. I did not know the depth of the couple’s love for each other, or that “What are You Doing for the Rest of Your Life” was the story of their love. I did not understand that God was using my gifts to speak His love to them and provide a final affirmation of their love for each other. I just went through my day as I always do — with song, prayer and an open heart.

Joseph Phillips
St. Anthony Hospital
Gig Harbor, Washington

Question for Reflection
What talents do you contribute to the ministry?
Service to Humankind is Service to God

Suggested Sacred Text

When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick. He told them: “Take nothing for the journey—no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra shirt. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town. If people do not welcome you, leave their town and shake the dust off your feet as a testimony against them.” So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the good news and healing people everywhere.

Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was going on. And he was perplexed because some were saying that John had been raised from the dead, others that Elijah had appeared, and still others that one of the prophets of long ago had come back to life. But Herod said, “I beheaded John. Who, then, is this I hear such things about?” And he tried to see him.

When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida, but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

Late in the afternoon the Twelve came to him and said, “Send the crowd away so they can go to the surrounding villages and countryside and find food and lodging, because we are in a remote place here.”


Sacred Story

The patient in the south wing of our hospital was well known to us. He was in the hospital for almost six weeks. A large man with a cheerful personality and a loving family, he was full of life and good humor. He greeted everyone with a smile and welcomed them into his life with warmth, friendliness and concern. No matter how sick he was, he remained cheerful, optimistic and believed in the power of God.

He had overcome many serious illnesses in his life: heart attacks, heart failure, diabetic complications, kidney failure, infection and cirrhosis. He withstood all of this, as well as many IV pokes and drainage tubes, with courage, dignity and unswerving faith in God.

With his last illness, however, he lost a good portion of his intestine and it appeared that God was calling him to heaven.

With a heavy heart, I entered his room to give him the news. He greeted me with his warm smile. Even before I could speak, he said, “How are you, Doc? You and your team have done all you can for me. I am now going to a better place. Take good care of your other patients, I’ll be all right.”
He had read my mind. I didn’t have to say anything else. He knew, and I knew, that he was slowly slipping away. Some of us have so much of our lives but appreciate so little of it: he had so little of his life, but appreciated so much of it. With a tear in my eye, I thanked him for giving me and our team the gift of being our patient and friend.

He died a few days later, and he will always be remembered for the lessons he taught us: courage, dignity and reliance in God in the face of adversity.

As caregivers, we get attached to our patients. The loss of even one patient can be devastating to us. However, if we remember the saying “Service to mankind is service to God” and borrow the courage and determination shown by our patients, our own mission becomes clearer. This helps us with our commitment to serve our patients even better!

Rup K. Nagala, MD
Oakes Community Hospital
Oakes, North Dakota

Questions for Reflection

What strikes you in this story?

What higher purpose does your work provide?

“He greeted everyone with a smile and welcomed them into his life with warmth, friendliness and concern. No matter how sick he was, he remained cheerful, optimistic and believed in the power of God.”
Heart and Soul

Suggested Sacred Text
You know what is in everyone’s heart. So from your home in heaven answer their prayers, according to the way they live and what is in their hearts. – 1 Kings 8:39

Sacred Story

It is made of small triangles of black, white and pink, patiently sewn together into squares. The pieces link to form hearts. It is a Heart and Soul quilt.

“Kaylen, you are my Heart and Soul” is the message sewn on the back of this special quilt, designed by a mother, Barb Baker, for her daughter, Kaylen. Barb had cancer, and Kaylen had fought it with her since she was three years old. Now, Kaylen is 15.

“She is my heart and soul, and it is so hard to leave her,” said Barb. “I don’t want her to feel alone, but when she does, I want her to pull this quilt around her and feel my love. Kaylen picked the fabric. I have told her that the quilt means I will always be with her.”

The quilt fabric, a sewing machine and a small ironing board were put in place in Barb’s palliative care suite. When the quilt was done, she worked with leftover pieces of fabric left to create a pillow.

“I knew I couldn’t finish the quilt in time, and some of the staff were concerned,” said Barb. “They called an experienced quilter, Helen Anderson, and she made the backing.” Helen worked non-stop for 12 hours, helping Barb ready the important gift for her daughter. It was Helen’s idea to embroider the back of the quilt with the message from Barb.

Is the essence of our work found in the words of our job descriptions, or is it in the heart and soul we apply to our daily activities? I know it is the latter. It was a sacred honor and privilege for our staff to help a mother provide her daughter with a quilt of love. In the years to come, she can wrap it around herself, feel her mother’s arms around her and hear her voice whisper, “Kaylen, you are My Heart and Soul.”

Karen Gallagher
St. Mary’s Healthcare Center
Pierre, South Dakota
“She is my heart and soul, and it is so hard to leave her. I don’t want her to feel alone, but when she does, I want her to pull this quilt around her and feel my love.”

Questions for Reflection

How is your heart and soul revealed in your daily activities?

What instances of selfless service have been “a sacred honor and privilege” in your life?
A Passion for Healing

Suggested Sacred Text

When Jesus came down from the mountainside, large crowds followed him. A man with leprosy came and
kneel before him and said, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.”

Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!” Immediately he was
cleansed of his leprosy. Then Jesus said to him, “See that you don’t tell anyone. But go, show yourself to the
priest and offer the gift Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.” – Matthew 8:1-4

Sacred Story

I’m passionate about dedicating my life to healing others, but I wasn’t always
that way. It began when a friend asked me to volunteer with her at Saint
Elizabeth Regional Medical Center. I was hesitant: I hadn’t been inside a
hospital in years. Frankly, I didn’t like being in a hospital, and I didn’t know
what to expect. It took a few weeks to aclimate, but I found myself looking
forward to volunteering each week. A place I had once feared had become
a place I felt at home.

I watched the doctors and nurses as they cared for patients. I dreamed of the
day that I might do the same. I began thinking seriously about a career in the
medical field, but questioned if I had the strength to support patients without
becoming overwhelmed.

In my senior year of high school, my dream gained strength when a classmate
sought help during a retreat. She walked to the front of the room, hesitant and
somber. Slowly, she picked up the microphone, looked around the room — and
asked us if we’d pray for her mom. Her mom’s cancer had come out of remis-
sion a few months earlier and the prognosis wasn’t good. The cancer had spread
to her brain and lungs. She feared her mom wouldn’t live to see her graduate.

It was at that saddest of moments that I was certain I wanted to be a physician.
My heart raced with the realization. I knew it was time to take a leap out of my
comfort zone. I found a passion for medicine.

St. Elizabeth’s Hospital has allowed me to spend time with patients and get to
know them. There is one patient I will never forget. When I first saw him, I
was taken aback. He was disfigured from head to toe; his hands were so badly
injured that he struggled to grasp his spoon to eat.
When I sat by his bed, he held out his hands and said, “I know I look like a monster, but I promise, I’m not.” I found myself helping him eat breakfast and visiting with him for more than an hour. He was scared and lonely. He told me all about his life and how wonderful everyone at the hospital was. It was clear that what he needed most right then was for someone to listen. He showed me how deeply an injury or illness can scar a person, and how little acts of kindness can impact another’s life. He was Christ in disguise, and he was teaching me.

Now, I will carry my passion for medicine and lessons learned from volunteering to a new adventure — I have just been accepted into medical school. I know this is my calling, and that it will always be a journey, with new opportunities unfolding ahead of me.

Katie Widers
Saint Elizabeth Health System
Lincoln, Nebraska

Question for Reflection
Who are the significant people or what are the significant events that helped you in your “call” to the health care ministry?

What brings you joy in your work?

“He showed me how deeply an injury or illness can scar a person, and how little acts of kindness can impact another’s life. He was Christ in disguise, and he was teaching me.”
A Daughter’s Love

Suggested Sacred Text

Jesus then said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” – John 8:31-32

Sacred Story

Our Flight for Life helicopter lifted into a brilliant blue sky dotted by fluffy, white clouds. We had been dispatched to the foothills for a vehicle crash, in which a sedan and a truck smashed head-on at high speed. As we approached, I could see massive damage to both vehicles and wreckage littering the road.

Flight nursing demands rapid assessment skills, accuracy, flexibility and creative problem-solving in challenging conditions, and I was ready. The on-site crew sent me to the sedan. EMS personnel were already working to extricate and stabilize an older man. When they saw me coming, they pointed to the driver of the car.

I’ll call her “Jill,” and she was a few years either side of 50. She had obvious fractures, a concussion and significant blood loss. I entered the back seat, securing her cervical spine and assessing the airway.

I looked to the front passenger seat and saw Jill’s unconscious mother. I could hardly reach her to put an oxygen mask on her face. She had a barely perceptible, irregular pulse. I could tell that she had multiple broken ribs and she was taking in little air.

Jill looked toward her mother’s crumpled body, suddenly speaking clearly. “My mom has a terminal respiratory condition. She has a Do Not Resuscitate order somewhere in here,” she said. “We were coming back from the mountains — one of my mom’s last requests.”

The DNR papers were right on the front seat! I thought, how does that happen — that the DNR papers are right there? I showed them to the medic working to free Jill’s mom from the car.

As I started an IV for Jill, she whispered, “How are my mom and dad?” I told her that her dad looked pretty stable and was being placed in an ambulance, but her mom was extremely critical. “She’s still alive and she can still hear you, if you want to say anything to her,” I told Jill.
“Thank you for your honesty,” Jill said. Then, she turned slightly in her mom’s direction and spoke tenderly.

“Mom,” Jill said, “You are the best mother I could have ever asked or wished for — even better, really. You raised me with so much love and confidence and made me feel I could accomplish anything. I have had all my life’s wishes come true because of you. You and Dad gave me everything that contributed to who I am today and I am so grateful — I only wish I could be more like you. I love you more than words could ever express.” Jill squeezed her mom’s hand and fell silent.

I asked, “Would you like a brief prayer?” Jill cried, nodding yes. Just as we finished, her mother stopped breathing. At the same moment, Jill was freed from the wreckage. Mother and daughter were freed simultaneously.

I still think of Jill often; her memory causes me to reflect on my job. It is difficult to put into words what an honor it is to have the opportunity to care and pray for people in such extreme settings, while being privileged to bear witness to God’s hand and the raw strength of the human spirit.

Kim Muramoto
Littleton Adventist Hospital
Littleton, Colorado

Question for Reflection

Sometimes the truth can be a difficult reality to communicate, yet when communicated with compassion it can be a freeing experience that brings people closer together. What truth are you being called to communicate this day?

“... what an honor it is to have the opportunity to care and pray for people in such extreme settings...”
Suggested Sacred Text

*I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die.*
—John 11:25–26

Sacred Story

Let me tell you a story. There is a strong yet lightweight wood, called Pacific Yew, which grows in Oregon. As a hobby, Bob took this wood and carved it into little crosses.

Bob’s wife, Beulah, was an ICU patient of mine. I remember her kindness, humor and love for her family. I will never forget our bonding during her daily bath at 3 a.m. She always told me how great she felt after her “magic bath.” Then she’d say, “Now Kim, you go take care of your patients.” I would say, “Beulah, YOU are my patient!”

Bob sat faithfully at Beulah’s bedside. He randomly gave out his hand-carved crosses. It was not unusual to see his crosses on name badges throughout the hospital.

One day as my shift came to a close, I went to Beulah’s room to say goodbye. Beulah asked me to bend down close. She whispered in my ear, “Kim, I am going to see Jesus today.”

Beulah’s legacy spreads beyond our hospital. Just a few weeks after she died, I took one of Bob’s crosses to Chicago so I could give it to my very ill grandma. When my grandmother passed away, I handed the cross to her best friend, who embraced it with love and tears.

I’m not the only one with such stories. A physician told me she passed her cross on to a patient’s struggling wife, because “She needed the cross more than I did.” During a recent survey by The Joint Commission, I learned that one of the surveyors had recently lost both of her parents. I gave her a cross. Soon after, I received a heartfelt thank-you note from her that said, “I carry my cross with me on surveys across the country. It is now in Boston.”

Little did Beulah and Bob know how far their legacy would travel: from Oregon to Denver, Chicago, Boston and beyond. The crosses were made by a kind,
loving husband to honor his dear wife of 62 years. They continue to provide peace, comfort and a special remembrance of lost loved ones.

Not a day goes by that I don’t look down at the cross that hangs from my own badge and think of Beulah and Bob and his crosses. Like Bob’s cross, my faith in and love for God was passed on to me by others, like my parents and grandparents. I now have the honor of sharing my faith and love with others.

Kim Roth
Parker Adventist Hospital
Parker, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

How can you share God’s grace with others?

What are your unique gifts of spirit? How can these gifts be used to inspire hope and healing in others?

The crosses were made by a kind, loving husband to honor his dear wife of 62 years. They continue to provide peace, comfort and a special remembrance of lost loved ones.
God at “Work”

**Suggested Sacred Text**

A farmer went to sow some seed. In the sowing, some fell on the footpath where it was walked on and the birds of the air ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, sprouted up, then withered through lack of moisture. Some fell among briers and the thorns growing up with it stifled it. But some fell on good soil, grew up, and yielded grain a hundredfold. — Luke 8:5-8

**Sacred Story**

I have been employed at Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center for about seven years. I have never been able to share my faith at any other job. Here, I feel blessed to actually be encouraged to share my faith with patients and coworkers.

You see, I have stage IV breast cancer, and I work as a cancer outreach coordinator. Many people ask how I can think about cancer all the time, at home and at work. I tell them that I look forward to going to work and having the opportunity to make a difference in someone else’s life. I can help others by showing them that God not only works through us, but helps us be at peace with traumatic situations in our lives.

God puts me in certain places and in connection with certain people, and I am able to share my faith with them. God makes it possible for me to show others that you can be faced with a life-threatening illness, yet remain positive, with both eyes on the Lord.

I’m not saying that I am always happy. Being happy and having an overall positive attitude are two different concepts. I certainly have my down days, but I keep focused on God and look forward to the days that I can work and spend time with my family. There are days I think I should not work anymore, but my husband reminds me of the impact I make and how many people I touch each day.

It has been a blessing that I have been diagnosed with cancer, because I have accepted that God may take me home at any time and I should appreciate every day, instead of taking life for granted.

**Kristi Perollo**

Saint Elizabeth Health System  
Lincoln, Nebraska
“God makes it possible for me to show others that you can be faced with a life-threatening illness, yet remain positive, with both eyes on the Lord.”

Question for Reflection

Have you ever had the occasion to ask, “Why me?”
Can you name the lessons learned through that question?
A Thanksgiving like No Other

Suggested Sacred Text

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, “Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” — Luke 14:12-15

Sacred Story

Sometimes, you know an event is not of this world due to its unique feel. This Thanksgiving was one of those events.

The week was cold and snowy. At Hospice House, some of the staff had trouble getting to work due to inclement weather and power outages. And, of course, the needs of our patients’ families were escalating due to fears that their loved ones might die on Thanksgiving Day. Raw emotions were everywhere.

On Thanksgiving, our cook, Steve, prepared a bountiful feast. He also shared a bit of his Thanksgiving perspective. Despite the hours of work to prepare a huge meal for more than 50 people, he was filled with joy and gratitude to "be alive and breathing." His recent personal battle with cancer had greatly affected him, and he was grateful to be able to serve everyone. Amen to that!

Our patients’ families shared in the feast. Chad’s bouncy, red-haired, three-year-old daughter put her fingers in the bowl of whipped cream, while her younger brother went for the cranberry sauce. It was hard to chastise them when we knew that their dad, just 34 years old, would probably not live past today. Ted, 83 years old, walked in slowly with the help of his daughters: he quietly took in the sights and sounds of Thanksgiving as his wife of 63 years was peacefully dying.

We also asked two of our patients to join the feast. Judy, 60 years old with end-
stage pulmonary disease, came with her family. Jason, 29 years old with end-stage liver disease, sat at the table with help from our staff. We tried not to allow our tears to take over when we realized that our Thanksgiving table was filled with the “least of them,” as Jesus said.

We never know what each day at work will bring, but if we are open to the Spirit, it will bring abundant blessing. With a thankful and humble heart I thank Thee, Lord God, for orchestrating a marvelous feast for us that Thanksgiving. May we always have open, willing hearts to care for the least of your creation.

Kristin Neufeld, RN
Franciscan Hospice House
University Place, Washington

Question for Reflection

How does your workplace and your coworkers reach out to those who cannot repay them?

“We never know what each day at work will bring.”
Sacred Story

I was in post-Katrina New Orleans, tasked with helping to paint a much-in-need residential facility for children at risk. I had a heart that was willing, but not much skill.

I tripped over paint cans, spilled more on my clothing than I put on the walls, and struggled to contribute in the most basic way to meet the most basic need. I’m not exactly a prissy woman, but I concluded that my world experience, especially that related to home improvement, needed development on many levels.

My path to being a mission leader has been an unconventional journey. More often than not, I am awed by the opportunity to be Christ’s hands in this way. But, I feel inadequate when faced with need I never anticipated or experienced personally. Monetary poverty is often the least of the struggle, even in times of financial crisis. The shortages we all face daily are scarcities of civility, depleted reservoirs of compassion, diminishing feelings of worth or the ability to make, or feel, a difference. My first inclination has been to look for the obvious fix – the proverbial fresh paint, if you will, that would quickly turn the worn into something new.

But, I discovered the danger in addressing these issues on only a surface level. The power of any “giving” we do is understanding the gift we receive is always greater. Sometimes, the gift we provide is not in our painting skills or other technical abilities, but our openness to relating with others – our willingness to enter unfamiliar situations; to speak with people who are vulnerable and suffer with them while preserving their dignity; to look honestly at what we have to give, as limited as it may seem; and to engage with all of God’s children. This is the most valuable and visibly demonstrated lesson taught to me by our Mercy sisters. It is also the hardest lesson, especially when you’re outside a comfort zone.

Another lesson I try to remember is how important it is to work alongside others. In the crush of humanness that surrounds us and the pace we keep, it is
easy to forget that alone, we can do nothing. On a day when I felt powerless, I was reminded of the source of all power. The following excerpt of scripture was just the strength I needed:

“Come to me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves.

For my yoke is easy, and my burden light.”

Matthew 11:28-30

We are never promised a “yoke-free” life. We have many lessons to teach and so many more to be learned. This exposure allows us to feel humbled, inadequate, vulnerable and poor. Not in dollars, perhaps, but in the breadth of human experience that often defines who we are and how we are seen.

Let us pray to embrace the learning found in the least likely of places – in the words of a delusional patient, in the sorrows of a colleague, in the tears of the mourning and in the wisdom of the aging – and let us be strengthened in knowing our Heavenly Father holds us in His palm as we go.

Laura Wenman
Mercy Medical Center
Des Moines, Iowa

Questions for Reflection

How can you be a source of God’s strength and spirit to others in need?

How do you replenish your spiritual reservoir?
Lifelong Learning

Suggested Sacred Text
You then are the body of Christ, every one of you is a member of it... Set your hearts on the greatest gifts.
— 1 Corinthians 12:27, 31

Sacred Story
I stretched out my hand to say goodbye, and tears began to roll down her cheeks. She tried to speak, but no words came from her mouth. Her sick husband said, “I’m going to walk down the hallway and back.” She asked, “Are you sure?” and he said, “I’ll be fine.”

As I continued to hold her hand, I didn’t understand her tears. She was clearly having an emotional reaction to our goodbye. I didn’t know what to say, but told her, “I, too, cry,” as I felt tears forming in my eyes.

I had talked with her husband about God’s blessings in our lives. He described ministry as a “shared road” as he recounted stories of his life as a missionary. His passion was being a lifelong learner in all circumstances. As he taught theology, he reminded his students that they were learning together. He also sent a number of his students through a Clinical Pastoral Education program, the program I was participating in, because of the value he saw in “experiential learning.” He told me, “The work you do is hard, but you’ll learn so much about yourself in this process and be a better minister because of it.”

Only the day before, his wife told me that her husband’s colon cancer had spread to his lymph nodes. They were not sure what to do next.

Now, as I held her hand, I told her, “I don’t know what God will do next in your lives, but I know that He is with you and will give you the strength that you need to walk though this with your husband. He won’t leave you.” She replied, “I know God is with us. Thank you.”

I wish I knew exactly why she was overcome with tears upon our parting. Words couldn’t capture what she was feeling. But, I know that her husband was right,
and we are all lifelong learners. We learn to adjust as life comes at us. As I bade this couple goodbye, I was learning about ministering to them – and being ministered to by them.

Lisa Nelson
Penrose-St. Francis Health Services
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Question for Reflection

Being present to another is sometimes the greatest gift that one can give; how are you present to "the other" in your work?

“I don’t know what God will do next in your lives, but I know that He is with you and will give you the strength that you need to walk through this.”
The Last Kiss

Suggested Sacred Text

*Be good and understanding, mutually forgiving one another as God forgave you in Christ.*
— Ephesians 4:32

Sacred Story

“Where is your God now?” Betty growled as her steely blue eyes pierced my soul. The inadequacy of my words kept them buried deep within my being. “What does your God think of me now?” Betty cried out after she told me about her daughter Kathy’s lifetime of drug and alcohol abuse.

After 51 years of life, Kathy lay naked on a gurney in the emergency room, covered by a thin blanket. Her skin sallow, her eyes rolled back and her fingers already blue, her weakened lungs labored to avoid the inevitable. Kathy was Betty’s only daughter and today, she was dying.

As we approached Kathy, Betty’s eyes began to flood with tears. In prayer, I brushed Kathy’s graying hair away from her cool and weathered face; a tear tumbled off Betty’s chin onto her child, who barely clung to life.

I followed Betty back to the waiting room and sat in the chair next to her. Tears streamed down her face as she expressed disbelief that her daughter was dying. All efforts to save her from self-abuse had failed; all hope had been exhausted. Betty’s voice trembled as she recounted the years of their turbulent relationship, time stolen by intoxication and arguments. She furiously described disruptions caused by the wrong men, bad choices and rejected advice.

Betty wept as she reminisced about the joy she felt the day Kathy was born. She shared a sweet story of a little baby in a pink dress welcomed home by grandparents and older brothers. Soon, stories of birthday parties and proms brought light to the space that, moments ago, was dark with rage and bitterness. That’s when Betty stood up, touched my face and kissed me on my forehead, giving me something that rightfully belonged to Kathy. No words were spoken as we took the long walk from the emergency room to critical care, where Kathy slept until she could relinquish her spirit.
Three hours later, Betty bent over and gently kissed Kathy on her forehead. Her motherly voice assured, “I love you, sweetheart,” words that overcame the eerie stillness and warmed the air with forgiveness. Kathy’s lips moved ever so slightly, and in that moment, she died.

The last tender kiss given by a grieving mother to her dying daughter forgave the past and gave way to unconditional love. I never know what I will discover when I enter into the chaos of another, but this experience was an undeniable testimony of the healing power of the Holy Spirit.

Lynda Cooke  
Penrose-St. Francis Health Services  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Question for Reflection  
How often are you willing to forgive colleagues or family members who may wrong you?

“Her motherly voice assured, ‘I love you, sweetheart,’ words that overcame the eerie stillness and warmed the air with forgiveness.”
What Really Matters

Suggested Sacred Text

There are different gifts but the same spirit, there are different ministries but the same Lord, there are different works but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone. — 1 Corinthians, 12:4–6

Sacred Story

Two things have been dear to my heart for most of my adult life: access to quality health care and the Spanish language and culture. I have been blessed to find a ministry with Saint Joseph Health System that enables me to combine those two passions.

In 10 years as coordinator of interpreter services, I have found that when assisting people with health care access, you never really know what you’re going to get. One day, you might help a patient obtain prenatal care so she can have a better chance to bring a healthy child into the world. The next day, you may be a conduit for the delivery of bad news, becoming a small part of the shattered world this news leaves behind.

The majority of my interactions with patients and their families are upbeat and lead to positive health outcomes. This part of my job brings me much joy and satisfaction. The difficult times bring satisfaction, too, although they weigh much heavier on my heart.

A patient in his early 30s, Alejandro, was having a liver scan. It was early October and he hadn’t been feeling well for a month or so. As we talked, we discovered we had mutual friends. He was a former co-worker of my husband’s, and his sister was known to my family, too. His liver scan led to a diagnosis of inoperable liver cancer.

Alejandro’s mom came from Mexico to be with him. I interpreted for the family several times between early October and late November. His family asked my help in extending his mom’s travel visa through the Mexican embassy. That was a step beyond acting as an impartial conduit of information, as medical interpreters are trained to do, but I was glad to be of assistance in the family’s time of need.

I visited Alejandro and his family in hospice care. How he had changed from the robust young man I had met just weeks ago! During the Thanksgiving weekend, we got the news that Alejandro had died. His sister had rocked him and wept as he passed.
“We had all worked together to give Alejandro the best possible final days of life.”

Being friends of the family, my husband and I went to the funeral. His mom went out of her way to thank me for all I had done. Though we all had tears in our eyes, we knew the best outcome had materialized: we had all worked together to give Alejandro the best possible final days of life.

Soon after the funeral, Alejandro’s brother-in-law set out to drive his body to Mexico, the culmination of many selfless acts I had witnessed by this close-knit family. They taught me about love, sacrifice, letting go and gratitude. As I mentioned, medical interpreters are trained to be impartial conduits of information, but it’s often an impossible standard to uphold. With Alejandro and his family, I may not have upheld that standard, but I came away a changed and better person for it.

Lynn Fors
Saint Joseph Health System
Lexington, Kentucky

Question for Reflection

How do you speak for others?
Bless This X-Ray Tech

This is what God asks of you: only this, to act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.
— Micah 6:8

Sacred Story

A hospital is often a place of extremes: hope and despair, healing and sickness, survival and death. For me, the emergency department is a central hub of extremes: rushing and waiting, moans of pain and quiet sighs of relief, absolute joy and complete devastation.

One day, I made multiple attempts to take Helen from the emergency department to the X-ray department. That’s not unusual: a doctor might be examining the patient, or the patient’s labs are being drawn, or whatever. Each time I came for Helen, however, it seemed that it was Helen holding things up. She had to greet a worried friend; she had to update her out-of-town daughter; she had to wait for some unknown, unseen something-or-other.

I admit that I was getting agitated. Each time I cannot complete an exam on time, someone else must wait.

On my fifth trek to bring Helen to X-ray, her doctor saw me coming and chuckled, “That Helen, she’s a feisty lady, isn’t she?” I didn’t appreciate the humor. I could feel my patience slipping away. Helen’s room was now filled with concerned friends and relatives. Although they meant well, a crowd always adds to the delay.

This time, I was closer to completing my mission than ever. I removed Helen’s pulse oximeter and telemetry wires and was ready to wheel her out of the room when one of her friends called out, “Hold it! You can’t take her yet.”

I felt my left temporal artery begin to throb. When I asked, “Why not now?” the visiting entourage replied in unison, “We need to pray first.”

I believe in God and I respect everyone else’s beliefs: still, I thought, “Really? Is that necessary at this particular moment?”

I backed away, leaned against the wall, folded my hands and bowed my head, still holding back my mounting anger. Helen and her visitors joined hands and began to pray.
“Our Almighty Father, please protect Helen and bless the good works of this hospital, the doctors and nurses who work so hard in the service of the sick and injured, and this X-ray tech for the gift of his loving kindness.” Ouch. I hadn’t exactly been a fountain of loving kindness.

That 30-second prayer melted my resentment. It was a call to pause and reflect on what was really important. Feisty Helen and her friends taught me a big lesson. To my surprise, their simple act of prayer reset my heart and my head. Even now, I call upon the memory of that night if circumstances begin to feel like I’m creating a work agenda instead of tuning in to my patients’ needs. God bless Helen!

MICHAEL E. WALKER
Penrose–St. Francis Health Services
Colorado Springs, Colorado

JESUS IN DISGUISE

I serve you Lord even though you wear the disguise of a homeless man, or an unwed pregnant woman, or an angry young man. You wear the disguise of a desperate mother, living in a place infested with bed bugs and roaches. You sleep on the floor. You are a neglected hungry child.

But sometimes it is hard to serve you in your disguises. Sometimes I long to see you as you truly are, as Peter did on the mountaintop. Lord, sometimes I tire of going the extra mile that you call me to; bringing food, looking for sources to help pay rent, delivering messages to someone with no phone, visiting an elderly shut in. I am reminded that it is not as if I am doing these things for you, but that I am doing these things for you. It is you who come to me needing healing; it is you who are sick, you who are in pain. As often as I need it Lord, remind me, that it is you.

Submitted by:
Mary Appeaser
TriHealth
Cincinnati, Ohio
THE EVOLUTION OF GENEROSITY

Suggested Sacred Text

*I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I will lay down my life for the sheep.* — John 10:14–15

Sacred Story

When I first interviewed with St. Joseph Community Health more than seven years ago, I wept. What I heard was overwhelming. Here was an organization committed to serving, with compassion and love, the needs of underserved people in our community. I felt I’d come home.

For several years, St. Joseph Community Health was like a benevolent creature whose arms were spread over our entire community, looking for ways to help alleviate social, economic and health disparities. We held town hall meetings and listened; we worked with the community to learn how we could help meet the needs they defined. Our goal was to empower communities, to offer tools that would enable them to sustain and adapt those programs using their own internal resources.

We offered health and education clinics; we supported minority economic development start-ups; we created a program that immunized infants; we took diabetes and cancer education to the pueblos surrounding Albuquerque; and much more.

But, our arms were spread so wide that it began to feel as if we were skimming many surfaces. So, we stopped, took a breath, and asked: what should we be doing? How can we use our resources to best serve this community, where the poverty level is high, obesity is a major concern, and too many families lack access to health information and resources?

After many hours of thoughtful consideration and exploration, as well as some degree of divine intervention, we decided to adopt the First Born program. Here was a program designed to start at the beginning of life, to offer support and resources to families, to answer questions they haven’t yet discovered they have, and to advocate for their rights.
Change the first five years and you change everything. Yes, we begin at the beginning, helping to guide families through the concerns of first-time parenthood, offering access to community services that help with housing, food, medical resources, income support, employment and education. Like the shepherd who tends to his sheep, St. Joseph Community Health is tending to God’s baby lambs. We help these young families address their challenges and embrace, enjoy and fully experience the blessings of their new life. I am so deeply moved to be a part of this work.

Norma Evans
St. Joseph Community Health
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Questions for Reflection

Starting something new often requires letting go of present activities or services. How can you discern what is best to leave behind in order to create something new to meet the needs of the future?

How can you be a voice for those who are vulnerable or in need?

“Here was a program designed to start at the beginning of life, to offer support and resources to families, to answer questions they haven’t yet discovered they have, and to advocate for their rights.”
Suggested Sacred Text

He called a little child to him, and placed the child among them. And he said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me.”

— Matthew 18:2-5

Sacred Story

On a crisp October morning, I prayed, “God, give me strength for this day.” I knew it would be a rough day. Hannah would struggle for every breath, her small body limp with exhaustion, her giant heart still pulling us to her.

When Hannah was just six weeks old, she was diagnosed with Werdnig Hoffmann Syndrome, a type of spinal muscle atrophy. When this syndrome appears in such a young infant, life expectancy is often measured in months. Hannah and her mom, Diane, had spent so much of Hannah’s life at St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center that she learned to call her room home, and the hospital itself was her neighborhood.

Months began to roll by. The tiny baby with a disease so awful opened people’s hearts more than they might have expected. Even though Hannah was in the pediatric unit, she was adopted by the entire hospital. She became everyone’s little girl next door.

Lab techs would gently coax blood from Hannah’s fragile veins. She learned to talk and let it be known that she did not like being awakened for X-rays, but the techs managed to make it a game she delighted in playing. She’d come back to find that housekeeping had made her room sparkle.

The months rolled into years, thanks in part to the exquisite skills and attention of her caregivers and her mom. The respiratory therapists worked to keep Hannah breathing. Pharmacy dispensed emergency medications for her at the speed of light. Hannah giggled when the dietary department sent up a surprise snack of French fries and ketchup — her favorite. Maintenance staff appeared in a flash to fix her television. Prayers sped toward Hannah on a spiritual care expressway.
When Hannah was four-and-a-half years old, we came to the end. Her final, precious few minutes raced by, and suddenly we were without Hannah. It was as though the entire hospital felt the exit of her spirit.

The loss of Hannah was profound, but so was her life. We are all only here on this earth for a short time. What an honor it is in health care that so many share their precious time with us as we try to serve them. What keeps me going is the knowledge that St. Mary-Corwin is an astonishingly big-hearted community, ready to embrace and do our very best for patients like Hannah. What a blessing it is that we can be an alternate home and family for such special patients, even if only for a short time.

Pamela Keller
St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center
Pueblo, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

CHI’s Core Value of compassion includes a cultural attribute of patient-centered care, defined as: “Our culture is one of commitment to quality care that is safe, personalized, comprehensive and collaborative.”
This story is an excellent example of the difference that can be made in the lives of others through patient-centered care. How do you help promote patient-centered care, either through direct collaboration with other caregivers or through support functions that empower caregivers?

“We are all only here on this earth for a short time. What an honor it is in health care that so many share their precious time with us as we try to serve them.”
**Almost 65 Years**

**Suggested Sacred Text**

*This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.—Genesis 2:24*

**Sacred Story**

On a Monday in July, I arrived for work at Flaget Memorial Hospital. I knew from the white rose in the crystal vase at the nurses’ station that there had been a patient death on Sunday. I paused and smiled, knowing this rose was for a special patient.

As a chaplain, I am privileged to see hundreds of patients each month. Some of those visits will stay with me for a lifetime.

One week, my visit list included a husband and a wife, who were both ill and in separate units at Flaget. I visited John first. He shared with me that he and his wife, Ellen, had lived a love story for almost 65 years. John told me sadly that his wife’s disease had robbed her of most of her memory of him and their life together, blessed with children and grandchildren in a small Kentucky town.

As we talked and prayed, I could feel his unwavering love and respect for his wife. I reflected on their enduring love. He asked me to go visit his wife next. When I arrived at her room, family members were gathered there, knowing that Ellen had little time left on earth. I prayed with the family.

Early Sunday morning, around 2 a.m., I was paged back to the hospital by the nursing staff. Ellen was near death and asking for her beloved John. The nurses, filled with compassion, moved her bed into John’s room, close enough that they could join hands.

In the midst of the messiness of everyday life, I know that this type of compassionate care takes place every day at Flaget. But, I also know that for many patients, their experience at Flaget is their “once-in-a-lifetime.” For Ellen and John, being at Flaget made her leaving this world a peaceful experience.

John never let go of the small, frail hand he had known for more than six decades. She had called his name and, as he had promised her as a teenager, in sickness and in health he was there for her. She died with her husband and soul mate at her side.
God’s grace was poured into our hearts as we witnessed the lived spirituality of their love and commitment to each other. May this experience of grace enkindle the fire within our hearts to never lose sight of the difference we can make in the lives of others.

Phyllis Bowling
Flaget Memorial Hospital
Bardstown, Kentucky

Question for Reflection
How might you address the needs of other couples especially when one of them is dying?

“As a chaplain, I am privileged to see hundreds of patients each month. Some of those visits will stay with me for a lifetime.”
**Comings and Goings**

**Suggested Sacred Text**

*There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven. A time to give birth, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted.* — Ecclesiastes 3:1–2

**Sacred Story**

As a chaplain, I have the privilege of serving patients and their families at some of the most poignant and intimate moments of their lives.

Ruth was sitting with her elderly sister, who was dying. Ruth hoped that her sister’s daughter would arrive soon. Ruth and I sat together at the patient’s bedside. Although her sister was non-responsive, Ruth held her hand and recounted stories from their childhood and other special times in their lives.

After a while, Ruth leaned toward her sister. “It’s OK to go,” she said. “We’ll miss you, but we’ll be fine.” Ruth settled into her chair again and slipped her hand gently around her sister’s. Every now and then, Ruth looked at her sister with particular tenderness and said, “I love you,” though her sister gave no indication that she heard.

The patient’s breathing slowed until there were noticeable intervals between breaths. Each time, it was hard to know if she would take another breath. Then, Ruth’s sister opened her eyes, told Ruth, “I love you,” and took her last breath.

A feeling of immense peace filled the room. We sat in the sacredness of the moment, aware that it is a profound experience to witness the passing of a life; it creates a bond deeper than one might imagine.

“One life ends, and another begins.”
My pager split the silence, and I left the room to respond. A couple was requesting a blessing for their firstborn son.

I re-entered the room to tell Ruth why I needed to go, but that I would return. Ruth gently gave voice to the very words I was thinking: “One life ends, and another begins.”

On the other side of the hospital, the joyful couple held their newborn son and greeted me with happy appreciation. As we shared words of welcome and prayers for a meaningful life, the baby smiled!

Time is a curious creation. While reflecting on the synchronicity of these two events, I returned to sit with Ruth. Her sister’s daughter had arrived. The three of us gathered at the bedside of the deceased patient, who had been a loving sister, mother, daughter, aunt and friend. We shared prayers of gratitude for a life well lived and appreciation for the sacred mystery of time in which we live and love.

Jude LaFollette
St. Mary-Corwin Medical Center
Pueblo, Colorado

Question for Reflection

How often are you able to slow down and take time to reflect upon the sacred mystery of time, life and death?
**Sacred Story**

It was a beautiful October day, crisp and clear, and picturesque New Hope, Pennsylvania, was full of tourists enjoying the colorful leaves and quaint shops in this bustling community on the Delaware River. After a pleasant afternoon, I was driving home when the car in front of ours stopped. The driver got out, opened a door and seemed to be trying to pull someone out of the back seat. I got out of my car and saw that the passenger in the car ahead was a man in his late 50s who was clearly in cardiac arrest. As we took him out of the car, I knew it would be only minutes before brain damage would set in. I went on autopilot. Without thinking, but drawing on all of my skills, I began to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation using rapid chest compressions.

I had never performed life-saving measures outside of a hospital before, and despite my training, it was terrifying. Someone had called 911, but traffic was heavy and it seemed to take the patrol car forever to arrive.

Finally, the patrol car came with a portable defibrillator. On opening the man’s shirt, I saw a scar from a bypass surgery, which made me hope the cardiac arrest had been caused by an arrhythmia that defibrillation could correct. Very soon, an ambulance arrived and took the man to a hospital. Two days later, a police officer called me to say the man had survived and was doing well. It gave me a tremendous sense of satisfaction to have experienced the sacred moment of holding someone’s life in my hands, and to have helped save that life.

I never knew the man’s name, or any other information about him. What I know is that helping to save his life was a one-in-a-million chance. Studies show that it is imperative to keep the blood flowing during cardiac arrest, or brain damage...
can occur in less than five minutes. Had I not been in the car right behind him, would he have survived? Perhaps God put me, and the gifts he gave me, in that place, at that time.

Ronald Massari, MD
Saint Clare’s Health System
Denville, New Jersey

Questions for Reflection

What gifts has God given you?

How do you use these gifts to advance the healing ministry entrusted to you?

“Perhaps God put me, and the gifts he gave me, in that place, at that time.”
I Just Don’t Know

Suggested Sacred Text

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, “Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today.” So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly. Jesus said to him, “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.” – Luke 9:5-10

Sacred Story

Brian came to the emergency department on a summer day. In his mid-40s, tan, dressed in a linen shirt and khaki shorts, he looked like he might have just played a round of golf. I introduced myself and told him it’s my job to screen all patients for their use of alcohol, tobacco and drugs. He invited me to sit down.

Brian’s well-groomed appearance belied a turbulent personal history. I learned that this educated, affable man had been homeless for more than a year. He was an alcoholic who had fallen off the wagon after eight months of sobriety. In one week of drinking, he had reached two liters of hard liquor a day.

Brian described the slew of problems drinking had caused him. He’d lost his home, his career, his fiancée and his hope. I asked him the question that all individuals struggling with addiction have to answer if they want to stay sober: “What will it take for you to quit this substance for good?”

Brian thought and finally said, “I just don’t know.” It was an honest answer from someone who’d tried every solution he could think of. We discussed treatment options. I offered financial aid that would provide some outpatient substance abuse therapy. But mostly, we talked. I tried to help him believe that life without alcohol would be far more promising for him than life with it. As he left, I felt hollow, thinking about the statistics for addiction relapse, injury and death.

A few weeks later my office phone rang. A cheerful voice said, “Remember me, Brian, the homeless drunk? Well, I’ve been sober since I saw you. I wanted to thank you.” I assumed he was referring to the treatment voucher, but, as it turned out, he didn’t even use it.

Brian continued, “I’ve been to plenty of emergency departments and it was always the same — I’d be shamed, blamed and brushed off. This time, I got a champion. I had no idea what I really needed was for somebody to believe in me. When you showed me you cared, it made me believe I could change.”
I’m grateful that the unknown, unseen movement of God in our lives brought Brian to me. He calls now and then to tell me how he’s doing. He found a fresh start in California, got a job and saved for his own apartment. Recently, he jubilantly announced that he’s closing in on 12 months of sobriety. He asked if I would present him with the Alcoholics Anonymous gold chip that marks one year of recovery. “I’d be honored,” I replied.

E. Ryan Hall
Littleton Adventist Hospital
Littleton, Colorado

Question for Reflection
Are there times that you tend to judge people by their behavior and give up on them?

“This time, I got a champion. I had no idea what I really needed was for somebody to believe in me. When you showed me you cared, it made me believe I could change.”
**Suggested Sacred Text**

For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

— Matthew 18:20

**Sacred Story**

I was precepting a new nursing graduate, Liz, who had never taken care of a hospice patient. She was nervous about the hospice process. She thought that she would not do well if the patient passed on. I reassured her that she would do fine.

Liz and I were taking care of an elderly patient who, with the guidance of her daughter, decided that hospice was the option for her. As the patient neared the end and her breathing became erratic, she became unresponsive.

The patient’s daughter, with her husband, children and grandchildren, were in the room. The daughter was nearly overcome with grief. I asked if she would like to get into bed next to her mother and cuddle with her. The daughter liked the idea and was happy to do so. She held her unresponsive mother while the family gathered around. The room came alive with prayer!

During the prayer, the patient unexpectedly opened her eyes and looked at her daughter. She then closed her eyes and passed away a few moments after the prayers ended.

Liz and I looked at each other in awe, sharing the knowledge that life is sacred in all stages. The sacredness of the moment helped us discover the strength and richness of the bonds of family love.

Later, Liz and I talked. She was inspired by everything she had witnessed. She said the experience was so much better than she had ever thought possible, and it may even inspire her to work with hospice patients and families in the future.

It was certainly a profound experience, and it brings both Liz and I peace to know that we helped this family through one of its most difficult times.

**Sally Saf**  
Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center  
Lincoln, Nebraska
“During the prayer, the patient unexpectedly opened her eyes and looked at her daughter. She then closed her eyes and passed away a few moments after the prayers ended.”

Questions for Reflection

How are you a healing influence in the lives of patients and families, especially in times of death or terminal illness?

How do you teach new associates to live Catholic Health Initiatives’ core values of Reverence, Integrity, Compassion and Excellence in their interactions with patients, residents and families?
Katherine’s Wish

Suggested Sacred Text

Whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable — if anything is excellent or praiseworthy — think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me — put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.
— Philippians 4:8-9

Sacred Story

As a non-clinician, I do not get to know the residents of Franciscan Villa nearly as well as I’d like. Fortunately, we have a program that encourages ancillary staff to assist in the dining room. That’s how I met Katherine.

Katherine was full of life, and her laugh was contagious. This seemed especially remarkable when I learned her story. Katherine did not have an easy life. She cared for both of her parents, including her disabled father. Because of these responsibilities, she never married. She had a sister, but did not see her often: her sister’s husband kept her sheltered from Katherine for reasons she did not know. She had few other family members or friends. Despite all of this, she was one of the most positive individuals you could ever meet.

She loved to tell everyone about her greatest passion in life: ice skating. In fact, she would remind me of this each and every time I visited with her. There was a park with an ice rink across the street from her childhood home, and she had skated there every chance she got.

As a resident of our nursing home, she was no longer physically able to participate in her favorite sport. Well, at least not in the traditional way…

Our foundation director had just created a “Wish Upon a Star” program. It gives residents a chance to fulfill a wish during their golden years. When I learned this program would take Katherine “ice skating” one last time, I volunteered to be a chaperone.

Four of us escorted Katherine to a local indoor ice rink that was hosting a youth figure skating competition. Katherine donned her beautiful fur coat, and I overhead comments that she looked like royalty. We were given rink-side VIP seats to watch the event. During an intermission, two young skaters took Katherine out on the ice in her wheelchair and helped her “skate” around the rink to applause from the audience. Katherine, of course, was all smiles.
I videotaped the event, and we held a “movie premiere” for Katherine and her fellow residents. She enjoyed re-living that day so much that she asked to have the video replayed multiple times. In the following weeks, she spoke often about her ice skating experience. It is immeasurably gratifying to know that we were able to provide Katherine this level of joy during her last days.

Katherine recently passed away. Her faith was remarkably strong, so I have no doubt that she died completely at peace. I receive great comfort knowing that she is once again skating her heart out, spinning and laughing the whole time. Being present to and with her reminded me of the sisters who were called to the work of caring for the ill and elderly. It reinforced my calling to be part of the health care ministry.

Scott Wallner
Franciscan Villa
South Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Questions for Reflection
When have you had the gratifying experience of contributing to another’s joy?
What is your greatest passion in life?

“In the following weeks, she spoke often about her ice skating experience. It is immeasurably gratifying to know that we were able to provide Katherine this level of joy during her last days.”
**Who Will the Spirit Send?**

*Suggested Sacred Text*

*Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.* — Matthew 11:28-30

**Sacred Story**

Each morning, I pray that the Lord will guide me when assisting the people in need that the Spirit chooses to send to my office.

My position as community resource coordinator at Mercy Hospital allows me to join with our caring and compassionate staff to help patients toward more hopeful, healthier lives. Part of our Mission is to “create healthier communities,” and I believe that our staff works diligently each day to accomplish that mission. I also believe that if we can relieve some mental anxiety and stress from our patients’ lives while they seek help with their illnesses, their chances for recovery may increase. So, we do our best to offer Christ-like hospitality, compassion and understanding.

Recently, I received a beautiful card from a patient I was able to assist:

*When I first felt ill in December, I was concerned about seeking medical attention due to my financial situation, but then I had to. It was a very depressing time for me, the idea of being sick and wondering how I was going to pay the bill. It was on my mind at all times. When my daughter read me the letter saying my account was paid in full, I cried for hours. I don’t think anyone could begin to understand the relief, the appreciation and gratitude for your amazing gift! Words can’t begin to describe it, so I am simply going to say thank you very, very much. You have lightened the load on my shoulders as I continue to fight my battle with cancer.*

Each day, I realize that although I work to provide financial assistance to those in need, it is I who am blessed by those who the Spirit sends to my office to share their stories of faith, strength and courage. They fill my cup with gratitude every day.

**Sharyl Johnson**  
Mercy Hospital  
Devils Lake, North Dakota
“Each morning, I pray that the Lord will guide me when assisting the people in need that the Spirit chooses to send to my office.”

Questions for Reflection

Who has the Holy Spirit sent into your life today?

How might you “lighten the load” for someone who is anxious or otherwise burdened today?
A VESSEL OF GOD’S LOVE

Suggested Sacred Text

Prayer of St. Frances

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.
Where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master,
grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled,
as to console;
to be understood, as to understand;
to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to Eternal Life.
Amen.

Sacred Story

I am a retired paramedic who worked in the EMS department at Memorial Hospital for several years. Early one morning, my unit was sent to a man having chest pain at a plant downtown. I admit feeling a bit aggravated because I had already answered several calls that day and thought it should be someone else’s turn.

On the scene, we found a man in his forties lying on a stretcher. We loaded him into the ambulance and began our journey to Memorial. When I asked the patient if he was still having chest pain, he said yes and started to cry. I told him that I could give him a stronger medication for the pain. He said, “It’s not the pain. It’s something that you would not understand.”

Now, I normally did not pry into patient’s private lives, but there was something about the way he said it that made me think he needed to talk. “Go ahead and try me,” I said. “I’m a good listener.”

Tears streaming down his face, he pointed to the necklace he was wearing, which had two gold T’s. He said that one was his, and one was his son’s. I said that they must be big Tennessee fans. He said, “Yes, but my son was killed in a car wreck two weeks ago, and I just haven’t been able to pull myself together. I’m so sorry for this.”

My heart sank and tears filled my eyes. I said, “Oh, sir, I am so sorry for your loss. But, I want you to know that I do understand how you feel. I lost a son just a few years ago. He died in a terrible accident as well. It was the worst day of my
life and will always be one that I will remember like it was yesterday.”

The patient said, “But you seem to have it all together. How do you do it? How do you live with the fact that you will never see your child again?”

By that time, I was trying hard to hold myself together because this man had triggered my memory of a time that was so devastating, I thought I could not go on. I said, “Sir, do you believe in God and heaven?” He said he did. I told him that my faith sustains me, and how my hope of seeing my son again someday is all I need to get through my days without him. When I have days that I feel weak and defeated, I ask God to be with me and keep me lifted up.

I had a guardian angel pin on my name badge, and kept extras in the ambulance. I pulled one out and held it in my hand. I pointed to mine and said, “This is my little guardian angel that reminds me every day of my son. It reminds me of where he is, and that I will see him again. I want you to take this one and keep it close to your heart.”

I again offered the patient some pain medication, but he politely said, “I don’t think I need that now.” As we rolled him into the emergency department, I remembered how aggravated I had been when I took this call. Ashamed of myself, I asked God to forgive me because I knew now that He had put me here.

A nurse asked our patient, “How is your chest pain now?” He said, “I have no pain. It’s all gone now and I’m feeling much better.” As I turned to look at him, he held up his little angel and mouthed, “Thank you,” with one of the biggest smiles I have ever seen, and this time there were no tears.

I learned that day that God works in ways we should not question. We should simply be willing to be the vessel that He wants us to be, a vessel He can use to bring a little comfort to a hurting soul. That’s something that all the pain medication in our drug boxes can’t do. I was very honored that God chose me and this hospital EMS service to be the vessel for His message that day.

**Shirley Henshall**
*Memorial Hospital*
*Chattanooga, Tennessee*

**Questions for Reflection**

Have you ever had an experience when you really didn’t want to do something and have it turn out the way it did in this story? That you saw clearly why God wanted you in this place at this time?
Suggested Sacred Text

“Lord, when did we see you hungry, thirsty, cold, in need?”
— Matthew 25:37

Sacred Story

Working in a hospital, we have many opportunities on a daily basis to see the Lord hungry for compassion, thirsty for peace, cold from loss of love and in need. At St. Joseph Medical Center, we have the awesome opportunity to respond to the Lord and meet those needs as often as we encounter them. Each encounter has the power of being sacred, and some touch our hearts at their very deepest. This is a story of one such encounter.

It was a December day just before Christmas, and the weather got worse as the day went on. Blizzard warnings were issued for the Baltimore area and the snow piled up fast. Everyone at St. Joseph Medical Center kept an eye on the weather, knowing that travel was becoming treacherous.

Late in the morning, an ambulance brought a very elderly man to the emergency department in cardiac arrest. He was accompanied by his wife. They lived in a nearby assisted living facility, and they had no family except each other. The patient’s prognosis was very poor, and he was moved to the medical/surgical intensive care unit. The chaplains provided regular presence, prayers and care as the day went on. The medical staff was tenderly attentive to both the patient and his wife, Mary, as she kept vigil at his bedside. At about 3 p.m., the patient died peacefully.

By now, the hospital had implemented its emergency snow protocols to deal with bringing in needed staff and hunkering down until the storm had passed. Mary, thirsting and in need, wanted to go home. But, because of the snow, her assisted living facility was unable to send a car to pick her up. Everyone felt terrible that she was stranded at the hospital grieving the loss of her lifelong love.

One of the chaplains went to the see if he could help. He saw Mary sitting at the exterior door in the emergency department, and he walked toward her. Then, he saw a large, four-wheel drive sport utility vehicle at the door. The driver was our director of facilities, Jeff, who had equipped his personal vehicle with signage that would allow it to drive the streets during the weather emergency.
As the chaplain watched, Jeff, as if with the arms of Christ, gently put his arm around Mary’s shoulders and said, “Let’s get you home after this difficult day.” He carefully guided her to the vehicle, settled her in, and drove her to her residence. This day, the lived spirituality in this sacred encounter certainly put the words of St. Matthew into action and, in doing so, brought uncommon warmth on a very cold and lonely night.

Susanne M. DeCrane, PhD
St. Joseph Medical Center
Towson, Maryland

Question for Reflection

How have I responded to the Lord, hungry for compassion, thirsty for peace, cold from loss of love or in need?

“Working in a hospital, we have many opportunities on a daily basis to see the Lord hungry for compassion, thirsty for peace, cold from loss of love and in need.”
WHO WILL BATH HER?

Suggested Sacred Text

God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.
— Genesis 1:27

Sacred Story

“Paging a chaplain to the emergency department.” I responded to the call to be with a family in the Emergency Department at St. Francis Medical Center. Mary had been brought in via ambulance and the staff was performing CPR on her. It was my privilege to be with her husband and son.

After repeated resuscitation efforts, Mary died. Her husband and son were distraught at the unexpected loss. Mary’s son informed me that their Hindu faith required that the family grieve with Mary’s body at home before going on to the funeral home. He asked me to help.

I called many funeral homes before finding one that would take her body home for a couple of hours, then take her to the funeral home. The family was very grateful. I learned more about the Hindu faith when Mary’s son asked me who would bathe her body before it left the hospital. He also told me that, in accordance with their culture, his mother’s body must be bathed by a woman.

I immediately offered to help, but I knew I couldn’t do it alone. The emergency department was very busy, but they called Megan, a flight nurse on standby, and she agreed to help me. The intensive care unit provided the supplies. Then, in the midst of the busy emergency department, Megan and I bathed Mary’s body. It was an incredible honor — truly a sacred moment, and a blessing. We prayed as we gently bathed and prepared her body for her family.

Later, the family came to our quarterly memorial service, where they lit a candle in memory of their beloved Mary. They expressed gratitude for her care, for washing her body and for helping them during such a difficult time.

I will always hold this memory in my heart, knowing we reached out in care and
compassion to respect and honor this family’s beliefs. It is a privilege to serve, and serve with, persons of many faith traditions. What a gift to have a part in carrying out our Mission for anyone in need.

**Theresa Gregoire**  
Penrose-St. Francis Health Services  
Colorado Springs, Colorado

**Question for Reflection**

CHI’s core value of reverence is defined as “profound respect and awe for all of creation, the foundation that shapes spirituality, our relationships with others and our journey to God.” How have you observed others living the core value of reverence?

“Then, in the midst of the busy emergency department, Megan and I bathed Mary’s body. It was an incredible honor — truly a sacred moment, and a blessing. We prayed as we gently bathed and prepared her body for her family.”
The Greatest of These Three

Suggested Sacred Text

And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.
— 1 Corinthians 13:13

Sacred Story

Until the birth of our daughter, Alina, I had reflected only on the concept of love, as Paul’s letter to the Corinthians does. I understand, expect and actively practice love in my personal and professional life. I wasn’t surprised by the love I feel for my first child. What caught me by surprise was the important role faith and hope played in bringing her into the world.

On the weekend of our third wedding anniversary, we headed to nearby Boulder, Colorado, to celebrate. My wife, Teresa, was 37 weeks pregnant, so we wanted to stay close to Littleton Adventist Hospital. Watching the sun set behind the mountains over a picnic in our hotel room made a perfect Friday evening.

On Saturday, we wandered through the Boulder Farmer’s Market.

When we returned to the hotel, Teresa noticed that her tiny passenger wasn’t wiggling as much as usual. We called our doula, who told us to call our doctor. The doctor on call recommended that we recheck in the morning and head to the hospital if we didn’t feel more movement.

Morning came. She couldn’t feel the baby moving. We checked into the hospital completely unaware of the journey of faith, hope and love on which we had just embarked.

The doctor told us that the baby was unresponsive to normal stimuli. Something was wrong, and the baby had to come out immediately. The doctor’s recommendation for an emergency caesarean section took our breath away! As the staff prepared Teresa for surgery, we fell back on a deep faith that the universe unfolds perfectly and that Teresa’s journey, and our baby’s journey, though different from what we had planned, was perfect. Still, we were absolutely terrified as they wheeled her into the operating room.

This is where the separation between faith and hope gets fuzzy. What we understood in those moments, as I held my wife’s hand and the doctors pulled our precious child from her stomach, is that faith and hope ARE love. They aren’t separate entities! God is love, love is perfect, love is ours, and in those moments, love guided the actions of everyone around us.
Alina was born at 11:40 a.m. on September 18, 2011. She matched the meaning of her name, which is “light” or “fair.” This seven-pound, one-ounce, 20-inch beauty was breathtakingly pale. After two blood transfusions, she was jaundiced, but otherwise healthy and strong!

The doctors realized that Teresa’s placenta had abruped and Alina had lost half of her blood back into her mother. Teresa needed blood transfusions due to incompatibilities with Alina’s blood type. Nurses administered medication to prevent Teresa from sensitizing against positive blood types. After the first intravenous dose, she had a reaction to the medication. She started to feel cold and to shiver, but again, she experienced that trinity of love.

She told me she needed to get through this out of love for our newborn daughter. We had faith in God’s presence and that the nurses would do everything they could to help bring her body under control again. The hope that faith and love and medicine would set the world right again flowed through every cell in our bodies. Love poured into us as we prayed. We got through it.

Two days later, Alina joined us in our hospital room as we celebrated our anniversary.

My new understanding of faith and hope brought me to a deeper understanding of why love is the greatest of these three. It is the application of faith and hope that, with the action of Spirit, creates an energy that is powerful beyond imagination. It is the power of God! I saw it in the tender care provided to my wife, to our tiny Alina, and even to me.

This verse from 1 Corinthians has been my favorite for many years, but only since my daughter’s birth do I feel I truly understand the wisdom and power it holds. Paul’s triune was at work in the hospital, and it proved powerful enough to bring us all home safely when Alina was four days old. She is still our child of light, although this is now reflected in her robust cry and beautifully pink skin!

**Tony Elliott**  
*Catholic Health Initiatives National Office*  
*Denver, Colorado*

*Question for Reflection*

*In your life events, how have you been surprised by the important role of faith, hope and love?*
Sacred Story

It was Sunday, and a very cold January day. I was about to leave the office to make home visits when my supervisor stopped me. “Vicki,” she said. “I’m sorry to add another patient to your rounds, but I need you to see this patient first.”

The patient was a 91-year-old woman receiving IV antibiotics, whose daughters had called to report a rash all over her body. I obtained the necessary information and headed to my car. I was afraid this was going to be a lengthy visit.

Upon arrival at the home, the patient had an obvious red rash that covered her face, neck, chest and arms. I had seen this type of rash before and immediately stopped her IV antibiotics. The patient’s two daughters were understandably alarmed by the sight of their mother, but she was stable. I called the IV infusion company nurse, then the patient’s physician.

As I talked with the patient’s daughters, I discovered that I had gone to high school with one of them, though she was a few years older. She asked my name and when I told her, she looked astonished and said, “You are Altolee Cooper’s daughter?” My mother, Altolee Cooper, died in 1960 when I was four years old. I have very few memories of her and had never met anyone outside of my family who had known her. “Yes!” I said. “Did you know my mother?”

She didn’t answer immediately. She grabbed my arm and pulled me toward her mother. “Mama, do you know who this is?”

"Her name is Vicki, and she is a nurse from home health," the patient said.

"Mama! This is Altolee’s daughter," the woman exclaimed. The patient began crying and hugging me. She had been my mother’s best friend. To say a lot of tears were shed would be a huge understatement.

By the time we finished our visit, the patient’s rash had begun to subside. And, at her request, I began to see her regularly as her case manager.

She was discharged several weeks later, but after that I received a call from one of her daughters, who asked me to come by later that week. The daughters had
prepared a wonderful dinner and four scrapbooks full of photos, newspaper articles and other memorabilia all about my mother. We pored over the pictures while my mother’s best friend told me about my mom. She remembered so much about when I was an infant and a small child. She told me about my mother’s breast cancer diagnosis, and even had a hand-written letter from my mother talking about her cancer and treatments.

“Vicki,” she said. “You look so much like Altolee, and your laugh and sense of humor are exactly like hers.” It was a joy to learn all these things about my mother.

As I got ready to leave, my mother’s friend handed me a bag and said she wanted to give me something for taking such good care of her. I explained that I was really not allowed to accept gifts, and that it had been my pleasure to care for her. “Well, you have to accept this,” she said. “This is the gift your mother gave me at my wedding shower in 1947.” I opened the bag to find a crystal fruit bowl and matching candlesticks. We hugged for a long time, tears streaming down our faces.

God works in mysterious ways and gives us the most precious of spiritual gifts. On a cold day in January, He brought this patient into my life. I am so thankful that our paths crossed and that I could care for her. It reconnected me with my mother. What an incredible gift.

The crystal fruit bowl and candlesticks sit proudly in the middle of my dining room table. In time, I will pass them on to my granddaughter. But for now, every time I walk past them, I smile and think about my mother and her best friend.

**Vicki Powell, RN**
Memorial Health Care Services
Chattanooga, Tennessee

**Question for Reflection**

*Have you ever written a note or given a call to a friend long forgotten?*
Suggested Sacred Text

*I know the plans I have in mind for you, says the Lord: plans to give you a future full of hope.*
—Jeremiah 29:11-14

Sacred Story

On June 1, 2011, two tiny babies would make me examine my convictions and question my faith, and prove to me how much we need God in our lives.

As I rushed to the operating room to help with an emergency Cesarean section, I reviewed what I knew about the patient. She was 23 weeks pregnant with twins, and one of the babies had non-reassuring fetal heart tones.

In the operating room, Tracy was lying on the table, her eyes wide and scared, an enormous amount of activity around her. She had walked into her physician’s office earlier that day for a routine visit and was now about to give birth. Before anesthesia sedated her, I looked her in the face, seeing Christ there. I introduced myself and reassured her that we would take good care of her and the babies.

She was quickly sedated and just as swiftly delivered two baby boys. Cohen weighed in at 15.4 ounces, Cooper at 14.8 ounces. They were immediately taken to the neonatal intensive care unit, where an amazing team was waiting for them.

In recovery, Tracy’s first question on waking was about her children. Her husband, Jesse, was at her side. I watched her tears fall and knew what she was thinking: the boys were too early and too small.

As we took Tracy and Jesse to meet the boys, I worried about what she would endure during the next few minutes. Cohen had a ventilator helping him breathe. Tracy held him while she and Jesse cried and prayed. Moments later, they watched as this little boy slipped from their loving embrace into God’s.

As soon as they were ready, we went to see Cooper. The team surrounded the baby, but gave the parents time to see him. The staff was gentle but forthright, cautioning Tracy and Jesse not to be too optimistic. I silently prayed to God to give them strength in the coming months and to help us all understand His plan.
The next day, I met Tracy and Jesse on their way to the NICU, and we stopped to visit. Cooper was very sick. She told me that tiny Cooper had a new nickname: Super Cooper, because when he entered the unit he held up one arm with a tightly closed fist, reminiscent of Superman.

It has been a long road for this family, including Cohen’s funeral, and the roller coaster ride that Cooper has taken. At four months, Cooper weighed in at six pounds and was doing well. Through it all, his mom and dad have been thankful for the support they have received, and their faith remains strong. Little did I know that in caring for them, they would be caring for me and strengthening my faith. As I see their happy smiles and their trust in God and His plan, I know that this family has been made whole again.

VICKIE WENZL
Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center
Lincoln, Nebraska

Questions for Reflection

When you cannot understand the plan that God has in mind for you, what do you do?

When you journey with another person along a difficult path (like the one in this story), how do you keep your perspective? Can you think of a time when you were on a difficult journey and someone helped you along the way? What did that mean to you?

“Cooper was very sick. She told me that tiny Cooper had a new nickname: Super Cooper, because when he entered the unit he held up one arm with a tightly closed fist, reminiscent of Superman.”
**My Angel**

*Suggested Sacred Text*

Then, when the whole assembly of the people was praying outside at the hour of the incense offering, the angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing at the right of the altar of incense. Zechariah was troubled by what he saw, and fear came upon him. But the angel said to him, “Do not be afraid, Zechariah, because your prayer has been heard. Your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall name him John. And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great in the sight of [the] Lord.” — Luke 1:10-15

*Sacred Story*

Late one afternoon, I received a call from human resources asking if I had time to interview an applicant. The HR rep said she had a walk-in interested in a vacant position in my area. I agreed, and she brought the applicant to my office.

My assistant, Roberta, and I talked with the applicant. She was an older lady taking classes for a degree in social services. She said she often came to the hospital’s chapel for the solitude. She lived in the area and felt she could concentrate and study better in the quietness of the chapel. She noticed the job posting and decided to apply.

As we asked our interview questions, we noticed that she did not answer the questions directly. She mainly said that she felt called to pray and talk to God about other people’s problems, needs or concerns.

After the applicant left, Roberta said she didn’t think she was quite right for the position. I agreed — but, knew that the applicant had come to be interviewed just for me.

Let me explain. Earlier that year, my daughter-in-law was told she had throat and lung cancer. Surgery was not an option, but she had radiation and chemotherapy treatments. I prayed every day for her, and I knew that God would not take my grandchildren’s mother away. But, God had other plans.

We learned of her cancer in January, and in August she was gone. I was devastated. I could not believe it. I was so angry at God. Every time I thought about my grandchildren being without their mother, I was mad all over again. This went on for several months. Then, my applicant showed up.

While what this applicant said didn’t make sense to Roberta, it made perfect sense to me. I knew that God had sent me this angel. I wish I could say my anger at God went away immediately, but it didn’t. But, what she told me helped me
work through my anger. I know God sent her to help me because He could handle me being mad at Him, but He knew I couldn’t.

Of course, God was in control. My grandchildren, just seven and 10 years old when their mother died, are fine. My grandson will graduate from a college he attended on a full scholarship. My granddaughter just graduated from high school, where she gave the invocation at her graduation. She will attend college on a full scholarship. I know God took care of them.

What happened to my applicant? You know, I never did receive the application she filled out. I don’t recall her name. I never saw or heard from her again. Did she continue to come to the hospital chapel for the solitude? Did she help others without them knowing it? I don’t know. I just know God is present if we choose to see him – or, in my case, let the scales of anger fall from our eyes. She was sent for me and I thank God for my angel.

**Virginia (Jennie) Chapman**  
Saint Joseph Hospital/Saint Joseph East  
Lexington, Kentucky

**Question for Reflection**

_The Catholic Church acknowledges and professes the existence of angels. The Bible is filled with examples of angels sent as messengers from God. This story shares the experience of a divine encounter with an angel. How does this sacred story inspire you? What experiences or questions would you like to share?_

“I know God sent her to help me because He could handle me being mad at Him, but He knew I couldn’t.”
A Place Near Your Altar

Suggested Sacred Text

As the sparrow finds a home and the swallow a nest to settle her young,
My home is by your altars, LORD of hosts, my king and my God!
Happy are those who dwell in your house! They never cease to praise you.
Happy are those who find refuge in you, whose hearts are set on pilgrim roads.
— Psalm 84

Sacred Story

The crisis pager went off about 2 a.m., calling me to the emergency department. I got there just as the medical team took that dreaded pause before stepping back and announcing the death of their patient — in this case, a two-month-old girl. The baby’s parents were there at her side, stunned and disbelieving. I stepped beside them and began walking through their nightmare with them. I remained with them for the next four hours as they tried to grasp what had happened and figure out what to do.

Whenever a child dies, the authorities must be advised and the situation investigated. Medical staff, local police and medical examiners all needed to ask questions and fill out reports.

The baby’s mother told the story. She had just fed the little girl. Because of a birth defect, the baby had to be fed through a tube. Right after the feeding, the baby had fallen soundly asleep. As was the mother’s habit, she put the little girl in a baby swing, then sat down next to the swing, let her Bible fall open and began to read it. When she looked up from her reading, she realized the baby was not breathing.

In 30 years as a crisis chaplain, I have sat with many young parents in similar situations as they were questioned by officials, but I never before heard a mother share that she was reading her Bible. I asked what scripture she had been reading. It was Psalm 84.
After all the officials had left, we read through Psalm 84 again and again. Each time we read it, the baby’s mother gained focus, until the words pierced her pain and brought acceptance. She looked at me with tears in her eyes and a smile on her face and said, “God is so good, and I am so blessed!”

I am often asked why I choose to work the night shift. I do so because in the darkness of the night, the power and light of the Savior shine so bright to those who allow it. I was blessed that night to hear this mother’s story of what God was saying to her at the very moment her baby took her last breath on earth and her first breath in heaven.

Warren Rich
Franciscan Health System
Tacoma, Washington

Question for Reflection

How have you encountered light in darkness in your time at CHI?

“She looked at me with tears in her eyes and a smile on her face and said, ‘God is so good, and I am so blessed!’”