



Sacred
stories

FOURTEENTH EDITION

† CATHOLIC HEALTH
INITIATIVES®

A spirit of innovation, a legacy of care.

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Foreword

Sacred Stories are Not Tidy

I had the opportunity to visit a mission leader at one of our sister CHI facilities in the Fargo division, and as I sat in the waiting area, I looked for something to read. On the table were several issues of *Sacred Stories*, the annual CHI publication that is filled with stories about experiencing the presence of God in our midst as we participate in the healing ministry of Christ. These are personal stories from employees that tell of lives touched by God's healing grace and mercy. They remind us that we walk on holy ground as we serve faithfully in this sacred call to heal.

I noticed that the books had been placed on the table in an orderly way, by issue number and year of publication. I got a kick out of that level of organization.

Then, it dawned on me that *Sacred Stories* are not very orderly. They are born from the love and grace of God coming to our messy lives — lives that need healing, reconciliation and hope. God does not wait until everything is in order to appear to us. That is the story of the Incarnation, the Word made flesh, Jesus.

*The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners;
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor, and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn, to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit. They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.*

Isaiah 61: 1-3

Sacred Stories come from untidy situations in which people need healing, compassion and grace. We participate in God's sacred work each day, incarnating God's love and healing touch. The good news is that God always comes, making himself known visibly and tangibly in love given; to bring wholeness and new life to us and those we serve; and to renew us with joy! This is indeed holy ground we serve on.

THE REV. MARIANNE ELL

Mercy Medical Center
Williston, North Dakota

“Then, it dawned on me that *Sacred Stories* are not very orderly. They are born from the love and grace of God coming to our messy lives — lives that need healing, reconciliation and hope.”

Introduction

We're pleased to present the 14th edition of *Sacred Stories*, Catholic Health Initiatives' annual collection of stories in which employees and other members of the CHI family share unforgettable moments of grace and lived spirituality in our environment of care.

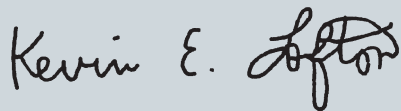
We are also pleased to dedicate this edition of *Sacred Stories* to Phyllis Hughes, RSM, DrPH, chair of the Board of Stewardship Trustees of Catholic Health Initiatives.

This edition of *Sacred Stories* is being published at a time when the provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act require Catholic Health Initiatives to reinvent the way we deliver health care. Each day, we seek inspiration that will help us find solutions to the challenges we face. Sister Phyllis provides us with that inspiration, as well as excellent leadership and guidance.

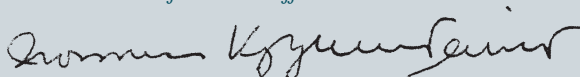
Sacred Stories is another reliable and valuable source of inspiration: a reminder of the difference we can make in the lives of those we serve and those we serve with.

When you read the stories in this edition, take a moment to read the sacred text that prefaces each story, as well as the questions for reflection at the end. We include these elements because they can bring deeper meaning to your reflections on what the stories mean to you.

Through the years, *Sacred Stories* has been used for personal reading; to begin each day with a reminder of our mission and vision; to start a meeting with a shared reflection, and in other creative ways. In this edition, the foreword is an actual sacred story that beautifully illuminates the experience of encountering *Sacred Stories* in our daily work. We hope you enjoy this edition and use it to enhance your days.



KEVIN E. LOFTON, FACHE
President and Chief Executive Officer



THOMAS R. KOPFENSTEINER, STD
Senior Vice President, Mission

Dedication



TO PHYLLIS HUGHES, RSM, DRPH
Chair, Board of Stewardship Trustees
Catholic Health Initiatives

With an exceptional blend of skill, experience, intellect and compassion, Sister Phyllis possesses every quality of an effective and inspirational board chair: unwavering commitment to mission and vision; strong leadership; a passion for health care; strategic thinking; appreciation of all viewpoints; strong facilitation skills and thoughtful diplomacy. Her personal qualities and her commitment to living the mission have won the respect and affection of everyone she encounters at Catholic Health Initiatives.

She is an exceptional leader who has the ability to look to the future and to encourage all of us to serve our patients and communities in the best possible way.

Sister Phyllis does not seek the spotlight, but we feel compelled to shine it on her. All of us at Catholic Health Initiatives are so pleased to dedicate this 14th edition of *Sacred Stories* to her.

BRIEF LIGHT

Suggested Sacred Text

Wisdom rescued from troubles those who served her.

Wisdom 10:9

Sacred Story

I was elated and smiling after an orientation at Alegent Creighton Health. It was a great day. Orientation had been great. I was entering my new profession as an RN in an organization that held values and faith that I had thought I could only dream of. I was going home to share some of my excitement with my children. As a single mom, nursing school had been a long journey, but it was all worth it. Things were coming together. Gratitude filled my heart.

As I walked toward the doors, a voice caught my attention. Standing at the information desk were three young ladies: one about 25, one a teenager, and one about seven. What drew me closer was the pain in their eyes. The teenager, standing with her arms crossed, seemed ticked off as well as scared. The child held the older girl's hand tightly. They were looking for the emergency department. Their father had been rushed to the hospital, his condition unknown. Fresh from orientation, I knew that Alegent expects employees to accompany patients and visitors to where they need to be.

The girls and I began to walk to the ED. The eldest thanked me, explained the situation and told me how very scared they were. The little girl said she was scared because her daddy was all alone. I stopped our walk briefly and told her, "No, honey, he's not alone. God is looking over his shoulder right now." She smiled, and we continued our walk. The teenager had big tears in her eyes.

We got to the ED, and I waited to make sure they were in good hands. As I said goodbye, the little girl gave me a big hug. Surprisingly, the teenager gave me a hug, too, and thanked me. I asked her why she was thanking me. With the

“The goose bumps I got at that moment were something I could only describe as heavenly.”

faintest of smiles, she said, “For reminding me.” The goose bumps I got at that moment were something I could only describe as heavenly.

Did God put those young ladies in my path to show me that my actions can make a difference? Or, did God put me there as a reminder of their faith? Perhaps it doesn't matter. God shows me every day that the actions I take can make a difference. Something as simple as a smile or as ordinary as escorting someone to their destination can make a difference. This has touched my heart forever. Thank you, thank you.

JENNIFER BRANDLE, RN

*Alegent Creighton Health Lasting Hope Recovery Center
Omaha, Nebraska*

Questions for Reflection

Where do you find hope in your life?

Is there an area in your life that seems hopeless and needs rekindling?

GOD'S RN

Suggested Sacred Text

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.

Psalm 23:4

Sacred Story

There was no family at this code blue. Not before, during or after. Of course, everyone else was there. I prayed at the foot of the patient's Mt. Calvary as her life here slipped away into a life beyond.

As staff cleared the room of equipment, I noticed a nurse hugging a young RN who I did not recognize. As we walked down the hall toward the nurses' station, I saw that the young nurse's eyes were flooded with tears. I motioned to the unit's experienced and compassionate nurse manager. We invited the young nurse into an office to offer Kleenex and listening spirits.

This newly graduated RN had just called her first code blue, performed "for real" CPR for the first time, and experienced her first patient death. "I was scared," she said. "Was I doing it right? What did I forget? Could I have saved her? I was praying and trying to think."

The nurse manager and I empathized, reality-tested some of her concerns, and reassured her that she had handled everything well. I complimented her on her ability to be skilled under pressure, yet be a compassionate professional.

"I don't want a perfectly programmed robot nurse," I said. "I want someone like you, who has a warm heart, sensitivity and spirituality, and who will become even more skillful with experience. You said you were praying — I wonder if that means you are one of God's RNs."

She gave a shy smile and nodded. "I guess it does," she said.

I gave her a hug and said, “I’m glad you and God were there with the patient when she needed both of you.”

I occasionally cross paths with that young nurse, and we exchange hellos. As she walks away smiling, I’m glad she knows she is one of God’s RNs.

BROTHER FRED A.R. STOVALL, SM, BCC

Good Samaritan Hospital

Dayton, Ohio

Questions for Reflection

How is it important that when family is not there, we are?

How might you endorse and encourage younger staff members as they serve God’s holy people?

“As we walked down the hall toward the nurses’ station, I saw that the young nurse’s eyes were flooded with tears.”

REMEMBER STEVE

Suggested Sacred Text

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Hebrews 11:1

Sacred Story

As a hospice chaplain and a member of the care team at Franciscan Hospice House, I spend my life in ministry witnessing the sacred. End-of-life care provides opportunities for healing within families and many other gifts. Sometimes, there are spectacularly subtle events that encourage my faith as I walk with my patients in the transition from life to life. Such is the story of Steve.

Steve's family had gone home for the night, and as I passed by his room I felt a nudge to sit with him for awhile and pray for him and his family. Steve had been unresponsive for several days. But, as I sat prayerfully in his silent room, I became aware of slight movements of his arms.

I stood and leaned closer to him to get a better sense of what was happening. Steve's breathing had the stop-and-start quality of apnea. Moving close to his ear, I told him, "It's okay to let go. Lean into what's next for you on your journey." Steve then became very calm. As I continued to pray, laying my hand on Steve, I could feel energy flowing from him, something I hadn't experienced before. I had a strong sense that Steve was leaving this earth and I was here to witness this sacred moment. Prayer took on a transcendence that I cannot quite explain. All I can tell you is that God was present! Steve passed from life to life soon after this.

I will always remember Steve and that day. For me, it was the day I understood that the passage from life to life is not just a theological or Biblical concept, but something very real; something quite sacred. Steve gave me a certain gift of life and hope that continues to carry my heart in ministry.

JENNIFER COOPER

Franciscan Health System

Tacoma, Washington

Questions for Reflection

As a member of the CHI community, how has your faith grown as you serve our mission?

How has your perspective on life been enriched by your journey with others through sacred experiences?

“Prayer took on a
transcendence that
I cannot quite
explain.”

THE MEETING

Suggested Sacred Text

All things are possible for one who believes.

Mark 9:13

Sacred Story

They shuffled into the room. The meeting was always at the same time, in the same place, and the agenda did not vary much. But, today was different. There was a leader coming from out of town. They all knew him, but some were not completely comfortable with him being there.

The meeting started without fanfare. The minutes were approved, and the committee reports began. It was then that he slipped into the back of the room. No one really noticed his silent entrance — no one looked up from their meeting materials. Still, after a while, they all knew he was there.

They knew what he expected and that his standards were high. Some said he was a boss who required flawless performance. Others said his strategies would take the organization in a direction that went against common industry knowledge and best practices. A few thought the fear of falling short of his expectations might hold them back. Others knew that all he expected was for them to do their best.

Though the meeting agenda and routine were well established, something had changed. People opened up more and shared more. They talked about what could be. They felt more team spirit and more willingness to work together. Their individual fears of not being seen as experts or being in control seemed to fade away. The focus changed from organizational impact to improving the lives of patients.

The group felt more connected and made far more progress than they had in previous meetings. The change was unmistakable. The silent leader simply smiled.

As they left the room, coffee cups and folders in hand, they spoke with new hope. They saw new talent and potential in their coworkers. They had a new sense of who they were and what they could accomplish.

As the last members of the group departed, the room now quiet and the lights turned off, the out-of-town leader — Christ — went with them.

RICK MILLER, DO

*Alegent Creighton Health
Omaha, Nebraska*

Questions for Reflection

While you are at work, at what moments do you sense God's presence the most?

How does God's presence affect the way you live, work and interact with others?

“Some said he was a boss who required flawless performance.... Others knew that all he expected was for them to do their best.”

QUE COMIERON TODOS?

Suggested Sacred Text

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Hebrews 13:1-2

Sacred Story

When the mother of one of our colleagues died, the obituary recounted that, after a long life, her concern was “Que comieron todos?”, which means, “Has everyone been invited?” It struck me as a wonderfully human and generous sentiment, one that reflected a deep spirituality and sense of the divine in everyone she met. Though I never met her, I envisioned a warm and affable personality, a person who welcomed a wide variety of characters throughout her life with enthusiasm and noble grace.

Welcoming the other is also part of the fabric of CHI. It stands behind our cultural attribute of diversity. If a visitor came to CHI and spent time getting to know how we do things and interact with each other, how would she describe what she experienced? We hope that she would describe a real spiritual core, humility, honesty, justice, accountability and diversity.

In our culture, diversity is not the same as tolerance of those who differ from us. For us, diversity is rooted in the Benedictine charism of hospitality — the gift of being able to listen to the other and hear in the voice of the other the voice of God.

Welcoming the other brings us into a conversation in which we welcome, respect and learn from the voice and perspective the other brings. We are enriched when we let go of the fear and suspicion that we often feel when confronted by the unfamiliar, foreign and alien. Only then can we begin to see the world differently and experience life in a new way. We are led to new insights and new ways of being and acting in the world. Our community, then, is not closed but ever expanding.

The suppleness of heart and mind needed to welcome the other is encouraged by the Rule of Benedict when he admonishes his followers to welcome the stranger as they would welcome Christ. Then, there is no stubbornness to learn but an eagerness to ensure that everyone has been invited and welcomed to the table.

THOMAS KOPFENSTEINER

*Catholic Health Initiatives National Office
Englewood, Colorado*

Questions for Reflection

How do you encourage and celebrate diversity?

Who is missing from your table?

“For us, diversity is rooted in the Benedictine charism of hospitality — the gift of being able to listen to the other and hear in the voice of the other the voice of God.”

UNIQUE VIEWPOINT

Suggested Sacred Text

*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;
and 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.*

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Sacred Story

As a new chaplain resident, I was on call for one weekend each month. My first weekend was a challenging one. There was a string of calls, patient visits and traumatic events on Saturday that left me sleep-deprived. Early Sunday morning, I received a call from the charge nurse asking that I visit a patient.

When I arrived, I knocked on the patient's door perhaps a little too loudly. A soft voice said, "Come in."

The room was dark, and I could barely see the patient, who was sitting upright in bed. I asked if I had awakened her, secretly hoping she would send me away so I could go back to sleep. She said, "No, I haven't slept much," and began to cry.

By this time my eyes had adjusted and I saw her reaching for something — a box of tissues. I moved the tissues closer to her, but she still could not find them. I realized that she was blind.

I moved my chair closer and put the tissues in her hand. She thanked me. Now, there was an unspoken understanding that I knew she could not see.

I listened to her as she expressed frustration about losing her sight at such a young age. I asked questions and listened empathically as she expressed regret at not having done more, or seen more, in her life. At one point she exclaimed, “I’m just so alone! No one can understand this!”

What she could not see or know was that I, too, have severe vision and hearing loss that will eventually lead to blindness and deafness. Gently, I took her hand and raised it to the side of my head. I placed it on my cochlear implant, which allows me to partially hear. A slow smile of understanding spread across her face and she said, “You get it!”

She reminded me that we are all called upon to use our gifts — whether they are fully functional or not — in every interaction. She reminded me to walk with patients, serve them with my unique viewpoint, and cherish the moments that are most sacred and close to my heart.

PAUL GRIEGO

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

Questions for Reflection

How does it feel to be truly understood, especially in a challenging or difficult time?

How do you seek to understand those who reach out to you?

SACRED PAUSES

Suggested Sacred Text

Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always.

Psalms 105:4

Sacred Story

Our quiet little town in western North Dakota has become a boom town due to oil production activity that more than doubled the size of our community in two years. With the dramatic increase in population, our hospital has become very busy, especially the emergency department. Being called in for traumas from vehicle accidents or work-related injuries is a part of our regular experience now.

Many of the people who come to us are from different parts of the country, here to make a living. Many traumas are complicated by the fact that no one has information on how to reach the patient's next of kin.

One night, I was called in for someone who was in a fatal accident at an oil rig. His phone had been smashed in the accident, so we could not get information from it. Fortunately, the company he worked for found out that his sister and her husband had just moved to town. Still, it took some time to contact the man's wife and speak to her about his death. His wife asked to speak to the doctor who had attended her husband.

The doctor bowed his head in prayer and paused for a few moments to gather his thoughts. He then picked up the phone and calmly explained what he and the team had done to try to save her husband. He mentioned that after his shift, he often thinks about his patients, wondering what their lives were like and keeping their families in his prayers.

It is difficult for a doctor to share this type of news in person, but even tougher to do it long distance, over the phone. By placing himself in the hands of God before this call, he was guided as to what to say.

It was very busy in the emergency department that night and there were many people yet to attend to. To witness the doctor's compassion was very moving. The doctor took a sacred pause, which led to a graceful moment. All becomes sacred when we place ourselves in God's service.

THE REV. MARIANNE ELL

*Mercy Medical Center
Williston, North Dakota*

Questions for Reflection

What happens when you pause to place yourself in the hands of God?

How do sacred pauses change you and your day?

“He mentioned that after his shift, he often thinks about his patients, wondering what their lives were like and keeping their families in his prayers.”

DEFINITELY A GOOD DAY

Suggested Sacred Text

Their eyes were opened and they recognized him...

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us?”

Luke 31: 31-32

Sacred Story

Holly came to the emergency department complaining of an infection in her throat. My first reaction was to feel repulsed: her skin was pockmarked, her clothing soiled and her hair a strange color of orange with black roots. She wore a tight blouse and an extremely short skirt. Deep down inside, I thought she was dirty and disgusting. Holly told me that she was a prostitute.

I was still a fairly new nurse. I tried to find an IV access point, but Holly’s veins were long gone, ravaged by years of heroin and other drug use. Through each poke of a needle, Holly remained cheerful. Still trying to find a good vein, I removed Holly’s thick silver bracelet and set it down on the gurney. After several more attempts, I was able to draw blood and administer antibiotics.

The whole process took quite a while, and I had come to know Holly better as we talked. My first judgment of her gradually melted into sorrow and compassion. I began to consider what her journey in life might have been like: her joys, her sorrows. I came to know her as a generous, friendly and patient woman.

Holly was moved from the gurney to a chair in the hallway to await her results. A menacing-looking man joined her. They appeared to argue, and she started crying. The man left, and I sat next to her in the hallway, explaining her discharge papers.

Suddenly, she realized that she was not wearing her bracelet. “Oh no, I need to find that bracelet! That was real silver!” she said. My face hot, I raced to the room where she had been, and searched the gurney and the bedding. No bracelet. When I told Holly that I couldn’t find it, she started crying again. She told me that bracelet was one of the only valuable things she owned.

In that instant, I prayed that God would help me find it. I went into the soiled linen room and faced a mountain of bags full of dirty linen. I prayed for God to guide me. Thankfully, I found Holly's bracelet.

Relieved, I returned the bracelet to Holly. Her face brightened and she hugged me. I pray that with the return of her bracelet, Holly found a special peace and joy in the presence of God, just as I had found the presence of God in Holly. Holly had given me a reminder to turn my heart away from judgment and toward humility and caring. It was definitely a good day.

JENNY BRINK, RN

*St. Francis Hospital
Federal Way, Washington*

Questions for Reflection

How do the coincidences in life invite you to slow down and become aware of the presence of God?

Think of a time when God was closer to you than you thought. Looking back, what was that experience like?

“My first reaction was to feel repulsed: her skin was pock-marked, her clothing soiled and her hair a strange color of orange with black roots.”

A WALK TO REMEMBER

Suggested Sacred Text

*Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; O Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry...
I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope.
Psalm 130:1-5*

Sacred Story

On any given day, it's not uncommon for me to assist a person or a family with a difficult life situation. As director of social and behavioral services, it's part of my job. Along with patient care, there are also community benefit activities that serve and educate our community members.

One of our community benefit activities is the Out of the Darkness Walk for suicide awareness and prevention. From the moment the 2011 walk was scheduled, it seemed that if something could go wrong, it did — from the loss of committee members to interfering floodwaters. Just when I thought I could not feel any more overwhelmed, our small community had three suicides. I was devastated — I was defeated — I was canceling the walk!

I prayed for peace of mind and heart, and went to work one day with every intention of canceling the Out of the Darkness Walk for 2011. As I sat down and turned on my computer, I prayed again, "Lord, please let me know I am doing the right thing." I opened my email box, and there were six messages with the subject line *OUT OF THE DARKNESS*. I opened each email and was shocked to find messages from educators and other community members, asking how they could volunteer for the walk.

I did not cancel the walk — how could I, when the community was reaching out to help? Now, I moved into high gear for an event that was only a few weeks away. I think God was on my side. The floodwaters went down, and the venue was soon ready for the walk to take place as planned. Everything fell into place.

The arrangements were not perfect, mind you. But, on a beautiful fall afternoon with 138 walkers, I realized it didn't matter what was lacking. What

mattered was that we were all together to grieve the loss of those we cared about, to celebrate life, to let those suffering know there is hope for a brighter tomorrow, and to send a message that suicide is not the answer.

On any given day, it's not uncommon for me to assist families in my community with difficulties. But, on this day, I realized that healing can come from being attentive to the voices and needs of others. By letting me know that the walk should go on, the Valley City community showed me that it is in community that we care for each other and help each other heal. For that, I will be forever grateful.

DEBBIE ANDERSON

Mercy Hospital

Valley City, North Dakota

Questions for Reflection

How often do you turn to God in prayer when things are not going the way you feel they should?

How often do you stop and express gratitude when things go well?

“What mattered was that we were all together, to grieve the loss of those we cared about, to celebrate life, to let those suffering know there is hope for a brighter tomorrow.”

A MUCH NEEDED DAY OFF

Suggested Sacred Text

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. Out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given.

John 1: 14, 16

Sacred Story

The healing process knows no schedule. That was abundantly clear to us with one particular patient we cared for at Good Samaritan's Inpatient Rehabilitation nursing unit.

The 58-year-old man was admitted to our unit after suffering a heart attack and then a stroke. As would be expected of a person this young, he was frustrated with his impairments and displayed a very flat affect — not initiating conversation and rarely making eye contact with us during his therapies.

Part of his concern was his younger wife, who was expected to deliver a baby by Cesarean section during his hospital stay. Our team discussed the importance of our patient being by his wife's side during the delivery and having some time to bond with their baby. So, we gave him a day off from therapy to spend with his wife and baby. We made up the therapy time later in the week.

The emotional boost the “day off” gave our patient was immeasurable. He became animated, smiling and talking about his baby and his excitement to go home to her. He began to progress much more rapidly.

His wife had some initial concern about how she would care for a newborn and for her husband at home. However, on follow-up, she shared how impressed she was with his progress and how well he was able to help take care of the baby.

“He became animated,
smiling and talking about his
baby and his excitement to
go home to her.”

Each patient who enters our door is unique, and we are called to care for all of them with reverence, integrity, compassion and excellence, knowing that sometimes, not sticking to the plan is the best plan in the end. That was certainly true for this patient. One change in his therapy schedule helped him turn the corner toward a healthy recovery.

ROSALYNN McDERMOTT

Good Samaritan Hospital

Kearney, Nebraska

Questions for Reflection

How has the birth of a child changed your life?

Can you recall a time in your ministry when you deviated from the plan and it made all the difference in the outcome?

BROTHERLY LOVE

Suggested Sacred Text

And the second is like unto it: Love thy neighbor as thyself.

Matthew 22:39

Sacred Story

One morning when I was working as an orderly some years ago, a man named Derek burst into the emergency department. He was frantic, sobbing, and out of breath. He was also disheveled and dirty, the kind of person it is easy to look right past. Pointing toward the door, he managed to tell us that his brother Tom was outside in a pickup truck and was sick.

We rushed out the door to find an old clunker of a pickup truck — the kind of vehicle it is easy to look right past. Tom was propped up on the seat of the pickup, leaning against the passenger door. His illness had overcome him; he had been dead for several hours already. Derek wept when we told him this.

I was overcome with sadness, but also a certain serenity as I learned the story of the two brothers. They had no other family, no friends and no possessions to speak of besides their clunky old truck and their spot in the dump where they parked it at night. The weight of their hearts and their care for each other was the sum of their treasures.

The more I listened to Derek, the more deeply I was affected by the depth of love and care he had for his brother. Derek didn't really want anything else in life except for his brother to be alive again. Each had taken care of the other in times of need. They were used to not being helped, so they didn't think of asking for help when Tom became sick.

That morning with Derek was a sermon with many lessons about family and neighbors. I've thought about it many times through the years. It reminds me of

two things. I don't need to depend on "things" and earthly possessions to be happy; love for family, friends, and neighbors is a much richer source of joy and peace. Also, I felt that someone should have noticed the brothers, reached out to them and guided them to assistance. I've thought of how many times I may have passed someone and unknowingly, or even consciously, looked right past them. It makes me strive to make sure that the someone who notices and helps is me.

LOREN LEWIS, MD

*Franciscan Medical Group
Puyallup, Washington*

Questions for Reflection

What do you find most touching or moving in this story? Why?

What is the most important thing in your life?

“The weight of their hearts and their care for each other was the sum of their treasures.”

A WINDOW, A PRAYER, AND HOLY MEDICINE

Suggested Sacred Text

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but always rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always endures.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Sacred Story

“Chow ba” (greetings honored elder woman), I said as I bowed my head, looking downward respectfully. The elderly Vietnamese lady looked up with surprise, then nodded in acknowledgement, as though a window had been opened without her knowing. With a few words, we were really in the same room, a shared space of an ancient culture.

As I produced my stethoscope, she sat upright with customary formality, breathing deeply. Everything was in a state of balance; there were no excesses of emotion or gesture. A cup of tea lay before her.

I checked her pulses, and remembered that some physicians of the East use that assessment alone as the main diagnostic tool. Perhaps she thought of that tradition, too, as I gently palpated her life force.

While checking her radial pulse, I noted a dainty piece of jewelry laced around her wrist. I produced a broad smile of recognition and looked warmly into her eyes. She understood that I knew and appreciated that it was a rosary bracelet. I showed her my crucifix on a chain around my neck, and she nodded.

Later, I returned with her tablets of medicine. The mini paper cup that held the meds took on a new dimension as she closed her eyes in prayer. She signed herself with the cross, invoking the Holy Trinity, and took her pills with a reverence I’d never seen before.

I realized that I was witnessing a holy moment. She had sacramentalized the often-dreaded routine of swallowing pills. This led me to pray, inquiring of our Lord, “What if everyone was so focused in submission to their health?”

MARK MOORE, RN

St. Joseph Medical Center

Tacoma, Washington

Questions for Reflection

How do you move your heart into a quiet space?

Name a holy and wise person that you know personally. What traits of that person do you admire?

“The mini paper cup that held the meds took on a new dimension as she closed her eyes in prayer.”

PSALM OF THE REDBIRD

Suggested Sacred Text

Be still, and know that I am God.

Psalm 46:10

Sacred Story

This past July, I was able to attend a week-long personal retreat at the Benedictine Retreat Center in Schuyler, Nebraska. I planned the retreat as a time to ask some serious questions and to listen, as best I could, for answers. I would meet with a spiritual director each day to help explore my spiritual journey.

My questions were:

- What does God want to do with the last portion of my life?
- How can I best respond to God's call on my life?
- What can I do to prepare?
- How can I use my own experience of grief and sorrow to help someone else?
- What does God want to do with resources I might have, and how might they be used for good in God's kingdom?

As a strategic planner, I am used to asking a lot of questions and to finding answers — through data and analysis or through the wisdom of coworkers and colleagues. My retreat questions, I knew, would not have quick answers. However, the retreat was one of the best weeks of my life. To be in a sacred space with ample time to ask, read, converse and reflect was a gift. I found myself more centered, more aware of God's gifts, and more willing to be engaged in my professional and personal journey.

The very first morning of the retreat, I had an amazing experience as I sat in reflection. The following verses reveal, as best as I can with words, one of the blessings of the week. I would encourage everyone to do a retreat periodically, as God has so much love and beauty to share with each of us.

Psalm of the Redbird

The morning sun starts its slow rise and a gentle breeze begins to stir.

It was almost dark, almost light when I passed near the shrine this morning.

Morning prayers are over, did God hear? We were so quiet, almost muted.

I gaze, now, at the image of St. Joseph; the myriad small colors illuminate the shrine.

I sit and rest and muse — what am I doing here? Why did I come to this far away place?

My mind wanders quietly, aimlessly; until a sweet sound pierces my brooding consciousness.

Then it sounds again and I recognize the song of a cardinal.

My eyes seek its presence just as my heart seeks the presence of God.

The cardinal then, graces me with appearing — it sits atop one of the evergreens.

It is brilliant!

I will it closer, but it flies the other direction — well drat!

Is this how it is with God as well?

When I seek God intensely and intentionally, does God flit away and fly the other direction?

How vain I am; how utterly selfish in my longing.

What about other eyes that wish to see the brilliance of a cardinal?

What about other hearts that yearn for the solace and comfort of God's joy and peace?

But then, as I sit quietly and wait, there comes another sighting;

This time — not one brilliant red cardinal — but two;

and looking closely I can also see a female with them.

They perform a little dance, on the ground, not in the trees.

From heaven to earth they have come — Christ with us, Immanuel!

Their ancient ritual brings delight to my eyes and joy to my heart.

PSALM OF THE REDBIRD (*Continued*)

I think then of God, our Creator, the earth's Creator, the Creator of the cardinals.

Out of God's thought and word the world was created.

This moment in time stays with me.

And so I have been given a truth — when I seek God intensely and intentionally,

I may feel like God flies the other direction, but that is only an illusion.

If I wait patiently; if I calm my restless spirit, God will appear again.

God will come to me and for an eternal moment, we are as One.

Thus I am counseled — by God's word, by God's spirit, by the cardinal.

CHARLOTTE LIGGETT

Catholic Health Initiatives Nebraska

Lincoln, Nebraska

Questions for Reflection

How, in your day, can you take time for deep questions?

In your professional journey, how have you seen the hand of God in your work?

“However, the retreat was one of the best weeks of my life. To be in a sacred space with ample time to ask, read, converse and reflect was a gift.”

STORMS NEVER COME TO STAY

Suggested Sacred Text

Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning.

Psalm 30:5

Sacred Story

Lent this year was unlike others. On Ash Wednesday, as ashes were placed on my forehead, I heard the words, “Remember man, you are dust and to dust you shall return.”

Nine days later — March 2, 2012 — weather reports indicated that storms were coming. As evening approached, winds and rain brought a heightened sense of foreboding. Warnings were issued on radio and TV: “Seek shelter immediately!” I sat on my bathroom floor and prayed that the storm would pass and no harm would come to the community. At 8:15 p.m., my phone rang. It was the hospital operator. A tornado had hit, a disaster was called, and I was needed.

Adrenalin kicked in, and before I knew it I was at the hospital. Within minutes, ambulances started arriving. An area off the front lobby had been converted to triage, where nurses worked with walk-in patients.

By 8:45 p.m., all 25 rooms in the emergency department were full, with overflow in the adjoining observation unit. The biomedicine department was converted into a makeshift morgue. Many victims and family members were in a daze, some unaware of the extent of their own injuries.

We received the sad news that one of our own employees had been found dead in a field, and her husband could not be located. Although they continued to care for everyone who was brought in, the reality that one of our own had been killed devastated the staff. Two of her coworkers came to the emergency department in tears over what they had witnessed near her home. At a moment like that, there are no words, and even prayer does not seem to comfort. I believe that God has a plan, but that plan is sometimes hard to understand.

The night passed quickly. In the midst of loss there were moments of absolute

STORMS NEVER COME TO STAY (*Continued*)

pride and hope. Physicians and staff had left their homes and families and made their way to the hospital. Staff who could remain beyond the end of their shifts did so. Surgeons and surgical staff stood in the ambulance bay for more than four hours, triaging patients and taking some to surgery. Ministers came to offer help. In the early morning, we were in shock over what we had experienced.

That night haunted my thoughts for many days. The emotional toll left me feeling empty, with little to give. I thought back on the words of Ash Wednesday: “Remember man, you are dust and to dust you shall return.” The night of the tornado made me aware of the dust of my limitations and of inadequate human responses. Still, this dust ultimately leaves me humbled — and hopeful.

In the weeks that followed, hope came through healing. In the days immediately after the tornado, the community rallied. Help came from all over the country to remove debris and help families begin to put their lives back together. In some ways the rebirth of the community was symbolic of what we celebrated on Easter Sunday. From the pain and agony of that one night came the beginning of new life, hope and resurrection.

“I believe that God
has a plan, but that
plan is sometimes
hard to understand.”

As I prepared for the Holy Saturday Easter Vigil, I read the words of the prophet Isaiah (54:10-13), which now have such profound meaning:

*Though the mountains leave their place and the hills be shaken,
my love shall never leave you nor my covenant of peace be shaken,
says the Lord, who has mercy on you.*

*O afflicted one, storm-battered and unconsoled, I lay your pavement in carnelians,
and your foundation in sapphires;*

*I will make your battlements of rubies, your gates of carbuncles,
and all your walls of precious stones.*

All your children shall be taught by the Lord,

And great shall be the peace of your children.

And I learned again the meaning of the Psalmist:

For with the dawn there is rejoicing!

LISA RUTHERFORD

Saint Joseph London

London, Kentucky

Questions for Reflection

What new life, hope and resurrection can you foster from a painful, traumatic event that you or others have experienced?

How are you present to others in times of grief and fear?

How do you preserve your spirit in times of great demands and needs?

THE 11TH FLOOR

Suggested Sacred Text

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

Matthew 18:20

Sacred Story

During the first week of my Clinical Pastoral Education internship, I shadowed one of the chaplain residents on the 11th floor, the oncology unit. I observed the ease with which she interacted with cancer patients. I thought, “I hope my supervisor doesn’t assign me to 11; I don’t have enough experience yet.”

But, when I worked a shift on my own a few days later, I was indeed assigned to the 11th floor. As the elevator climbed, I silently prayed: “God, I’m nervous, please help me today.” Once I was on the floor, a nurse asked me to see a patient, Beth, who was having trouble sleeping.

During our visit, Beth apologized for the shaking and jerking of her body. She explained that she had Parkinson’s disease and was unable to take medication for it because of other treatments. Although she had expressed her desire for companionship, I saw that talking was causing her restlessness to increase. In an effort to provide presence and help her rest, I offered to sing to her. She agreed.

I sat beside the bed, took Beth’s hand and began to softly sing, “Oh Lord, you’re beautiful...” As the song filled the room, peace settled on both of us. The shaking of Beth’s body began to subside, with the exception of her right leg. She asked if I would sit at the end of the bed and lay my hands on her leg as I sang. And so I did, one song after another. At times, Beth would quietly join me in a chorus. In the midst of it all, I sensed the nearness of God. After we spent an hour or so in this sacred space, Beth’s family arrived. We all prayed, and I said goodbye.

As a new intern, I was a bundle of nerves when I arrived on the oncology unit that morning. I didn't feel that I had anything to give. Yet with each visit, I gave what I had and God intervened to give more.

But, being with Beth really left a lasting impression on me. It did something significant on the inside. I went in to be present to her and left feeling like she had ministered to me.

It was late when I clocked out and I was exhausted. Yet, as I made my way to meet the shuttle, the peace I felt in Beth's room continued to linger. As I drove home, I felt an overwhelming sense of fulfillment that I have never experienced before. When I got home, I wrote to my supervisor asking to be assigned to the 11th floor.

JACQUELINE COOK

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

Question for Reflection

Where do you encounter God within your work?

“In an effort to provide presence and help her rest, I offered to sing to her.”

THE COLONEL

Suggested Sacred Text

"Son of David, have mercy on me!" And Jesus stopped and said, "Call him." And they called the blind man, saying to him, "Take heart; rise, he is calling you."

Mark 10:49

Sacred Story

"He's sleeping," I thought to myself as I peeked into the room. "Don't bother him." But, I realized that I was simply hesitant to go in — I had been told that this 94-year-old gentleman didn't respond much to others, and when he did, he was confused. So, what did I think I could accomplish?

"Mr. H.?" I asked quietly from the door. After a moment, I heard a soft, "Yes?"

I introduced myself, and the visit plodded along until Mr. H. shared that he had been in the military.

"What branch?" I asked.

"Army Air Corps," he replied.

I responded with a smile, "World War II pilot?"

He nodded, looked up at me, and his stunning blue eyes were suddenly clear.

"Bomber pilot," he said.

For the next half hour, Colonel H. came alive, sharing stories of air raids over Germany, including an incident in which his squadron was attacked by the Luftwaffe. All appeared to be lost as the smaller, faster German planes attacked the slow-moving bombers. Then, out of nowhere came the "Red Tails" — the Tuskegee Airmen, who saved the day.

Finally he paused and apologized, saying, "I'm sorry — you're probably not interested in all that old stuff."

"Oh, I am," I said. "My father served in the Army in Burma during World War II — he just never wanted to talk about it."

“Do you know how long it’s been since someone called me Colonel?”

“Cavalry?” he asked.

“All I know is that he was in ordinance,” I said.

In the minutes that followed, I learned more about what my father did during the war than I had ever known before. The colonel explained the conditions my father worked in, the danger he faced, and the courage needed to do what he did — bomb disposal. It was as if the colonel knew my dad better than I did.

The colonel appeared to tire, so I reluctantly brought our visit to a close.

“Thank you, Colonel — it was a pleasure and an honor to spend time with you,” I said.

He began to cry, and when I expressed concern, he said, “Do you know how long it’s been since someone called me Colonel?”

As a chaplain, I know that visits are supposed to be about the patient. But that day, I think both patient and chaplain were blessed. I got to know my father better, and Mr. H. was Colonel H. again, at least for a little while.

NANCY HARRIS

Penrose-St. Francis Health Services

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Question for Reflection

Everyone wants to be recognized and valued; how do you recognize those who call out to you?

COMPASSION IS OUR THIRD CORE VALUE

“Compassion asks us to go where it hurts, to enter into the places of pain, to share in brokenness, fear, confusion, and anguish. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human.”

Henri J.M. Nouwen

Sacred Story

At a meeting with a potential business partner in Bangalore, India, I was actively involved in the meeting dialogue. We had toured the campus earlier, and I was pleased to be seated in the air-conditioned board room.

Then it began. I just did not feel well. I considered jet lag and the change in climate. Shake it off, I said to myself, and continued to take part in the discussion.

Then, I felt acute abdominal pain, the likes of which I had never experienced before. I excused myself from the meeting as gracefully as I could and found myself seated in front of a physician in the company’s onsite clinic. After examining me, she said, “Mr. Charles, you have the dysentery. You will become violently ill.” The adjective drew my attention.

The car ride back to the hotel lasted more than an hour, I am told. I was unaware of anything other than the stomach pain and the fear that I would not make it back to the hotel with my dignity. Chills started as a fever escalated. I was desperate to get in bed under as many covers as possible.

Dazed, I was in and out of sleep. Then, I met him. “Mr. Charles, my name is Deepak, and I am here to help you.” I was resistant to company of any kind. However, Deepak said he would not think of leaving me alone, in a foreign country, sick as I was and without a wife present to care for me.

I resisted. He persisted. He was never intrusive, but present, a sentinel of compassion. I also met Ratan, Deepak’s colleague in compassion. Their focus was my healing — hydration, rest, food, warmth. I would wake to find new

blankets placed on top of me, porridge on a tray by the bed, and a glass of coconut water on a coaster.

Henri Nouwen, arguably one of the finest pastoral theologians of the 20th century, believed that what is most personal is most universal. I present this experience to serve as a reflection on compassion, one of the four core values that define CHI. As caregivers, we are comfortable extending compassionate care to others, but are we able to receive it in return? Many of us in health care serve in this ministry because we are most comfortable showing compassion. This experience tested and transformed my ability to receive that which I strive to extend.

In our culture, compassion is not being polite and nice to another. For us, it is the capacity to enter into the human experience of another, no matter what their circumstance. You have to have it to give it away!

CHARLES CHAMBERLAIN
Catholic Health Initiatives National Office
Englewood, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

In order to give something, we need to also receive it. What is your experience of giving and receiving compassion? How does this experience enhance how you lead with compassion?

As CHI transforms to meet the needs of communities, how will compassion distinguish the way we advance our ministry?

How willing are you to accept the compassion that God provides?

How does compassion permeate the way you lead, serve and live your life?

SMALL AND SIMPLE CHANGES

Suggested Sacred Text

If I speak in the tongues of men and angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

Sacred Story

She came to us from California. She picked North Dakota because she was “betting there was no heroin here,” and she wanted to become clean. She had been kicked out of her childhood home by age 11. She hid in bushes at night and attended school by day, until a friend’s mother took her in. By age 14, she had learned ways to make “big money.” Her life became a life on the streets. At age 32, she wanted to start a new life, and to North Dakota she came.

Our employees had never encountered such harshness and vulgarity as she displayed when she first came to our emergency department. She called us names that shocked us. Yet, each visit built familiarity. The core values our employees believe in and carry out began to smooth her harsh edges. She began to realize that no matter how she behaved, no matter what words she spoke, no matter how often she came through our doors, no matter how many demands she made, we were going to serve her and love her with the Love of Christ.

As time passed, we became more comfortable with letting her know about simple manners, simple boundaries, and a simple understanding that she, too, had a responsibility to be gracious to those who served her. We began to see the creation that God intended her to be.

Ten years after her arrival, she had found enough self-worth to lose weight, dress herself well and use manners and kindness to get her point across. She had delved into God’s Word and had personally become a child of God.

“She called us names that shocked us.
Yet, each visit built familiarity.”

Was she still a little rough around the edges? Most certainly. But, there were small and simple changes for the better.

She helped us realize something as well: that judgment cannot change a person, only love can — for God is love. She was our mission with “skin on.” Through her, God showed us what we can do together as we uphold the core values, doing what God called us here to do.

JAN BAKKE

TODD SCHAFFER

JEANNE UNRUH

MICHELLE WEIGERT

Carrington Health Center

Carrington, North Dakota

Questions for Reflection

When have you loved and served someone who was difficult to love and serve?

Who are the people around you that put the "skin on" our mission and core values?

TWO TRAFFIC TICKETS, ONE LIFE LESSON

Suggested Sacred Text

So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'"

So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

1 Samuel 3:9

Sacred Story

Have you ever noticed how often God speaks to us? Sometimes it's vivid, sometimes subtle. Most often it's when we least expect it and when we need it most. Amazing.

God presented me with a truly magnificent gift during the summer of 2006, on a Wednesday morning in — of all places — traffic court.

A few weeks earlier, I'd been pulled over for driving too fast. The ticket said I was going 47 miles per hour when the speed limit was 35. But later that day, I noticed that the posted limit was not 35, but 40. Seven miles per hour over the limit is different than 12, so I went to court to make my case.

The court referee said the speed limit changed the same day I got the ticket, and that the signs on that street at the time I was ticketed said 35. The ticket would stand. However, he reduced the charge to "driving with a broken tail light." The fine would be \$175. It wasn't about the money; my sense of justice was offended.

There were about 50 other traffic transgressors in court that day. One was a young soldier, there with his wife. He told the judge that his infantry unit would be deployed to Iraq the next day. He wanted to settle his ticket before he shipped out.

The judge asked if the soldier could afford to pay his \$250 fine. The soldier said no, not at that time. The judge told him and his wife to go to a room where they could make payment arrangements.

Here's what I saw: a young man going off to the physical and spiritual awfulness of war, worried about how his wife would make ends meet while he was away; and a young wife worried about her warrior husband.

When my turn came to stand before the judge and agree to pay my fine, I asked the judge if the court would permit one citizen to pay the fine of another citizen. I wanted to pay the young soldier's fine as well as my own.

I wrote two checks. When I wrote the check for \$175, it felt bitter. Something was being taken from me under unfair circumstances.

When I wrote the check for \$250, it felt sweet. It was not being taken from me; I was giving it away. It felt wonderful.

The two tickets I paid that day had nothing to do with money. They were about God speaking to me about the joyfulness found in even the most humble acts of philanthropy.

God knows all of us and speaks to each of us in ways that we can understand. That day, God spoke to me about giving and joy in a very personal way. God made sure I knew, as I wrote two checks, that giving is not about the money. "Money" is merely one of the many languages found in Christian charity. Sometimes, charity is as simple as saying "thank you" to a coworker. That, too, is a precious gift.

God smiled on me that day, reminding me that the commandment "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is not about our feelings toward others, but about our purposeful action toward everyone who is near us – not just the folks next door.

JAY MALONEY

*Catholic Health Initiatives Foundation
Colorado Springs, Colorado*

Questions for Reflection

When in your life have you heard God speaking to you?

Recall a time when you have been charitable to another or the recipient of someone's generosity.

What did you feel in your heart?

HEAL THYSELF

Suggested Sacred Text

And He said to them, "No doubt you will quote this proverb to me, 'Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.'"

Luke 4:23

Sacred Story

Those of us called to the healing ministry of Catholic Health Initiatives can get so busy focusing on the healing of others that we forget this important passage from Luke: Physician, heal thyself; or, Caregiver, heal yourself.

I often forget that although I work to heal others, I am wounded and broken myself. However, this woundedness can serve as a foundation or starting point of our healing service. Out of woundedness can come an openness and willingness to be vulnerable, which helps me recognize and understand the wounds of others. That's when I can truly begin to help them along the path to healing with the kind of compassion they deserve.

As Catholic priest and author Henri Nouwen said in his book, *The Wounded Healer*, "Compassion challenges us to cry out with those in misery, to mourn with those who are lonely, to weep with those in tears. Compassion requires us to be weak with the weak, vulnerable with the vulnerable, and powerless with the powerless. Compassion means full immersion in the condition of being human."

However, when we fuel our compassion as Nouwen suggests, we run a risk. When we give that much of ourselves, we may not have enough left for the next patient. If we fail to replenish ourselves, we may become tired and ineffective in ministry.

Fortunately, in our faith-based workplace culture, we honor each other as wounded healers by providing opportunities for self-compassion: showing ourselves the kind of compassion that we share with others. I've found that it's especially important to do this at times when I feel inadequate. That's when I

most need to treat myself with kindness and caring, rather than being harshly judgmental or dismissive of my own suffering.

Learning to extend compassion to myself has also helped me grow in my work of helping providers and families work through ethical dilemmas. Learning to honor myself as a wounded healer has taught me to refrain not only from excessive self-criticism, but criticism of others. In this way, my own woundedness has revealed for me the ability to perceive the divine in the wounds of others, and to recognize the presence of God within our ministry.

CARL MIDDLETON, DMIN

*Catholic Health Initiatives National Office
Englewood, Colorado*

Questions for Reflection

How often do you take time to reflect on those aspects of yourself that are in need of healing?

What do you do daily to foster the healing required within you to be able to facilitate the healing of others?

“When we give that much of ourselves, we may not have enough left for the next patient.”

GRADUATION FOR MICHAEL

Suggested Sacred Text

... Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.

Then the righteous will answer him and say, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger, and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?"

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 25:34-40

Sacred Story

Michael came to the Extended Care Psychiatric Unit at Our Lady of Peace from the male forensic unit. On admission, he was angry and argumentative. He had been taken from his parents when he was just 18 months old. Since then, he had been in and out of numerous foster homes and residential treatment facilities.

While in treatment at our Lady of Peace, he attended Peace Academy, the public school on our campus. Because he had attended so many different schools, there was a question about whether he met the requirements for high school graduation. However, one day he told a nurse that he was going to graduate. The nurse congratulated Michael, but noticed that he seemed tentative in his response.

As the nurse talked with Michael, she learned that he was disappointed because he would not be able to take part in a traditional graduation (Peace Academy does not hold any ceremonies).

When the nurse mentioned this to her colleagues, they decided to arrange a graduation ceremony in the gym as a surprise for Michael. They invited the high school principal to present the diploma, and arranged for the chief nursing officer to give an inspirational speech.

The next morning, the nurse presented Michael with a graduation cap and gown. Without prompting, all of the other children stood up and applauded. One boy even told Michael, “I think I’m going to cry.”

The gym was buzzing. Administrators, managers, unit staff and his fellow patients looked on as Michael received his diploma. There wasn’t a dry eye in the audience. The most touching part was how grateful Michael was to be honored for something he had done.

The staff gave him a small gift with a card they had all signed. When he opened the card, he took the time to read each entry, another sign of his gratitude.

Two days later, Michael was discharged to Boys Haven, a local home that provides stability, education and skills that lead to success in adulthood. He has plans to attend college.

VICKI BECHTEL, RN

*Our Lady of Peace
Louisville, Kentucky*

Questions for Reflection

How can you be more attentive to the unspoken or subtle needs of others?

How can you celebrate the successes of your patients, clients and colleagues?

How are you a source of joy in the world? Who are your sources of joy?

WE ARE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Suggested Sacred Text

“For where two or three have gathered together in my name, I am there in their midst.”

Matthew 18:20

Sacred Story

Every day, as I work in Guest Services in the front lobby at St. Francis Healthcare Campus, the opportunity to minister to others is apparent. Sometimes this ministry takes place in a very tangible way. At other times, it is subtle, even unknown, to those it touches. Sometimes we, the staff, are the ones being touched.

As I work, I observe families coming in to visit a loved one. When a patient’s day is going well, they come in with smiles and laughter. But, when they enter in a somber way, I am aware that their loved one may be near the end of life. How do I respond? Always with a smile, but also with a silent prayer on my heart.

Sometimes families come rushing in, saying their loved one was just brought to emergency. Again, I say a silent prayer not only for the person in need, but also for the family, the ambulance workers and the nurses and doctors responding.

The saddest time is when someone is lost — either in our nursing home or hospital. I see families in tears. Again, my response is a prayer, and — if desired — an ear to listen, or a hug of comfort. After all, we are all in this together.

I, too, have received care from those I serve. Three years ago, when my 94-year-old father was dying, I was not able to go and be with him. When our regular visitors and staff became aware of the situation, they told me that I was being held in their prayers. I could feel their support and love, and I was comforted.

About a month later, I was invited to a memorial service at our facility. I always thought this service was only for families who lost someone we had served. I found that it is also for employees who lost a loved one. With no family nearby, it was very comforting to me to attend this service. Those who planned the

service couldn't have known, but they included a very special song that is not commonly heard, but was used at my father's funeral. I took this as a sign that Dad was okay and in God's arms, and that I, too, would be okay. It was another reminder of the unseen ties that bind us together in care for one another.

MARIAN F. BRAUN

*St. Francis Healthcare Campus
Breckenridge, Minnesota*

Questions for Reflection

How is prayer present in your interaction with others throughout the day?

The author affirms the connection of the human family. When was the last time you pondered this truth?

Does being connected to others enhance how you advance the ministry entrusted to you?

“My response is a prayer, and —
if desired — an ear to listen, or
a hug of comfort. After all, we
are all in this together.”

MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT FOR YOU

Suggested Sacred Text

My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.
2 Corinthians 12:9

Sacred Story

It's not easy for a busy 30-year-old to be still, but that's what was required when a simple surgery took a very wrong and very long detour. The surgery was supposed to require a brief stay in the hospital, followed by a quick return to normal. For Heidi, a stay-at-home mom, "normal" meant keeping up with her three children, ages two, six and eight.

She realized that something was terribly wrong when she woke up in the intensive care unit and saw the faces of two high school friends who lived out of town. She thought, "What could be wrong, and why are my friends here?" The thought was trapped in her mind because she couldn't utter a sound. A tube was in her throat to help her breathe. In fact, tubes seemed to be coming from every part of her body.

Her surgery did not go as planned. The removal of a golf-ball-sized, slow-growing tumor of the nerve that connects her ear to her brain resulted in unexpected brain fluid and swelling. Heidi couldn't talk, breathe on her own or move any part of her body.

As Heidi laid in the ICU, 2 Corinthians 12:9 kept spinning through her mind. Now, after a year of rehabilitation, she believes the verse helped pull her through. Reflecting on her year of weakness, she can see that it actually made her strong. Relying on God's grace brought her family closer to each other and to God. Heidi believes she was a personal witness to God's healing grace and divine presence. She still has some limitations — she's deaf in one ear, has difficulty with balance, quickly becomes fatigued, and can't drive at night — but she's very, very thankful.

“Reflecting on her year of weakness, she can see that it actually made her strong.”

Heidi has “paid it forward” by participating in a Women in Touch group and a Brain Injury Support Group, providing her quick wit and support to others who have gone through life-changing events. Her experience at Immanuel Rehabilitation Center has changed the trajectory of her career, too. Heidi is planning to go back to school to pursue a master’s degree in speech pathology.

ANGELA LAMPE

*Alegent Creighton Health Immanuel Rehabilitation Center
Omaha, Nebraska*

Question for Reflection

How has your life been blessed by God’s grace?

NUDGES FROM THE DIVINE

Suggested Sacred Text

You have searched me, Lord, and you know me.

You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

Before a word is on my tongue you, Lord, know it completely.

You hem me in behind and before, and you lay your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

Psalms 139:1-6

Sacred Story

I'm a "baby" volunteer who has been working with Mercy Hospice for just a few months, but the time I have spent there has already had a profound impact on me!

The first night I came to Mercy Hospice in Johnston, I was nervous. But, I really enjoyed being with the patients; I was surprised at how easy it was to sit with them and listen to their stories. Tasks that I thought would be difficult, such as assisting the aide with a bed bath or helping someone to the toilet, were easy when I focused on the person rather than the task. What I learned in my first hours of volunteering is that hospice is about life.

I'm not a person who believes that coincidences are accidents. Instead, I view these synchronicities as God giving me a nudge! When I try something new, I find that God gives me a little encouragement to make a new path feel like the right path. That first evening at the hospice house, two patients I worked with had the same first names as my grandparents. Was it coincidence, or divine nudge?

I had another nudge on a different evening at Mercy Hospice. I introduced myself to a patient and she said, "April, that's a pretty name. Wouldn't you know it: my father's birthday was April 9, and here you are, and here I am in room 9."

I don't think these small but sacred connections are coincidence! These nudges, whether subtle or obvious, keep me in tune with the divine and give me hope that I will be an instrument of the divine as I volunteer at hospice and in my daily life.

APRIL YOUNG

Mercy Hospice

Des Moines, Iowa

Questions for Reflection

How often are you able to discover God giving you a nudge?

How often are you mindful of the person you are serving and not the task?

“I’m a not a person
who believes that
coincidences are
accidents.”

GIFTS

Suggested Sacred Text

*I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.
Matthew 25:40*

Sacred Story

Matthew's parable emphasizes the importance of serving where service is needed. We should love every person and serve anyone we can. That love glorifies God by reflecting our love for Him.

Abby and Emma are two young sisters who visited our mobile dental clinic one morning. It was not what I consider to be an "ordinary" visit. Just getting them on the bus was more difficult than usual. Glitches in their paperwork challenged us, but their personal challenges were much greater.

You see, Abby and Emma were recently adopted because their mother and father are nowhere to be found. Their new mom had explained to us the girls' histories of abuse and how she was working with them to overcome the physical and emotional scars they bear. The girls were frightened by just about everything, including a routine dental checkup, and needed extra-special care.

Thankfully, God has blessed each of us with special gifts that we can use to minister to others. It took many gifts to get the girls onto our bus, treated, and dismissed with smiles that day. Two of our clinical team members have the gift of welcoming spirits, and were able to coax the girls to climb the stairs and enter the bus. Other staff members used their gifts to help the girls relax and allow us to provide dental care.

The girls left having had a good experience — something that hadn't happened often in their lives. Allowing God to use us as instruments of His will permits great things to happen.

MARY WUBBOLT

St. Joseph Health Ministries

Lancaster, Pennsylvania

Questions for Reflection

Can you recall a time when you did something and knew you were the hand of God?

Have you ever experienced being so afraid that it almost paralyzed you? What did you do?

“The girls were frightened by just about everything, including a routine dental checkup, and needed extra-special care.”

NURSING IS A LEGACY

Suggested Sacred Text

But Jesus said, "Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."

Matthew 19:14

Sacred Story

At the age of five I said, "Mommy, a nurse is what I want to be."

Nursing is a legacy.

That's the beginning of a poem I wrote in 1990. I am passionate about nursing. My mother was a nurse. I spent my childhood playing "nurse" instead of "house" or "school." So, I knew I was called to be a nurse. What I didn't know was that I was going to be called to pass that legacy on to a son I have never met, who lives on the other side of the world.

At a monthly nursing meeting, an item on the agenda was a nursing school in Tanzania, a ministry of Alegent Creighton Health. The hope was for our nurses to pull together and raise \$1,300 to cover room, board and tuition costs for a student nurse. Tanzania is desperately short of nurses, with only one nurse for every 2,500 people. With 1.8 million people who suffer from AIDS/HIV — plus a high risk of serious infectious diseases such as typhoid, malaria and plague — Tanzania's need for nurses is neverending.

I had a sense that I had to do something. I took a deep breath and a true leap of faith, and asked to sponsor a student nurse by myself. God would provide the way.

A couple of weeks later, I received an invitation to participate in a Nursing Leader Forum and share some of the best practices of our neonatal intensive care unit with others. I didn't expect anything in return. But, at the end of the forum, the organizers thanked me for my presentation and handed me a check for \$1,500 — \$200 more than the sponsorship commitment! I instantly realized that God had simply used me to write a check for a Tanzanian nurse!

In time, I received a wonderful letter and a picture from Noel, a bright young man entering nursing school in Tanzania. Life has not been easy for Noel. When he was eight years old, his mother's death left him orphaned and responsible for his two-year-old brother, Daniel. Noel worked hard, but he missed having the love and guidance of a parent.

We began to send letters back and forth. Noel was so proud of his grades that he sent them to me (he got an A+ in infection prevention!). Nursing is a bond between us. He calls me "Mummy." His picture hangs in my office and he inspires me every day. To me, he is my son.

This is the end of the poem that I wrote in 1990, the same year a boy named Noel was born in Tanzania:

Today my child comes to me, "Mummy, a nurse is what I want to be."

Yes, nursing is a legacy.

TRACY MEYERS

*Alegent Creighton Health Bergan Mercy Medical Center
Omaha, Nebraska*

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever acted spontaneously, on an impulse, not knowing how you were going to accomplish what you said you would do?

How did it turn out? What did you learn?

“In time, I received a wonderful letter and a picture from Noel, a bright young man entering nursing school in Tanzania.”

UNEXPECTED SIGHTING

Suggested Sacred Text

He has showed you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:8

Sacred Story

As a hospital chaplain, I have witnessed many tragedies and deaths. There are times when it becomes so overwhelming that I have asked myself, “Where is God?”

I met God today in an unexpected way and at an unexpected time. As I was finishing my responsibilities for yet another patient who had died in the hospital, I noticed a young man sitting at the end of the hall. Something inside of me told me that I needed to meet him. He introduced himself as David and shook my hand. David is a 27-year-old man with Down syndrome.

David was drawing and coloring a picture. “Do you like to draw and color, David?” I asked. “Yeah, I draw a lot,” David said.

“What are your favorite things to draw?” I asked.

“Whatever I think about,” he said.

I looked more closely at David’s picture and I saw that he was drawing an ambulance. “Is that a picture of an ambulance, David?”

“Yeah...my dad rode in the ambulance,” he said. “He got sick at the store and they came.”

“Wow, David, that sounds pretty scary,” I said.

“No...not really,” he replied as he continued to color. “My dad said that God was with him.”

“Yes David, God was with your dad. Thanks for the reminder.” We shook hands again as we parted ways.

Where is God? David had answered the question for me. God is with us; that's the Gospel story.

God is with the young man who sits in the psychiatric unit of the emergency department and is convinced he is Jesus. God is with the elderly man in the coronary care unit who dies of a massive heart attack. God is with the family who camps out in the critical care waiting room, praying and waiting to find out if their 21-year-old son is going to survive a tragic motorcycle accident. God is with David as he comes to the hospital day after day to visit his father and express himself with paper and crayons. And, yes, God is with me as I walk into each of the lives of the people God places in my path.

Where is God? I met God in David today. I wonder where I will meet God tomorrow?

STEVEN A. MILLER

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

Questions for Reflection

Where is God in your work?

Who has shown you how to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

“God is with David as he comes to the hospital day after day to visit his father and express himself with paper and crayons.”

MOLDED BY LOVE

Suggested Sacred Text

As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

1 Peter 4:10

Sacred Story

I can't put a name to it, but something started to change in me about 15 years ago. Small things began to matter more. Other people began to matter more. What I thought would be the plan for my life began to shift, and I slowly began to find kinder and gentler ways of being me. Generosity began to matter more. I was starting to feel the presence of something I couldn't explain.

My spouse was also growing, and was volunteering to visit patients at Mercy Medical Center. As I listened to her experiences, I began to think that maybe I could also do that. Eventually, we became a team, visiting patients and bringing them communion. Our route included the mother/baby floor. We shared in the joy of families welcoming little ones: new babies who came from God to begin their lives in our world.

One day, I heard a talk given by a hospice nurse. Hospice work was something that I never, ever, planned to do. Why on this good, green earth would I want to volunteer at a place where people were dying? But, the hospice nurse's talk really touched my heart. She made hospice service sound so loving and kind; who wouldn't want to be involved? I attended hospice training.

Because I had been working with my hands all my life, I thought of a way of serving in hospice and being with people who were on their way to meet God. I could help them make something memorable for those left behind: a mold of the hands of the patient and a loved one.

I have made hundreds of hand molds over the years, and I have been touched many times by the kindness and love of those who are dying and those who care for them. It's always an emotional moment for me when I first open the mold. I always pause for a moment in thoughtful respect for the patient.

One day, I received a call to make a mold for a young man who had collapsed while working out and was dead by the time he arrived at the emergency department. I typically make hand molds on the living. This would be different. I couldn't say no, and I needed to say yes. The young man had gone to meet his God unexpectedly, and making his hand mold took on a different sense of ceremony. I think of that experience of grace as a lesson for us all. We need to be prepared to meet God at any time.

Working with hospice patients helps me to appreciate and love life more than I ever thought I could.

DAVID MILLER

Mercy Hospice

Des Moines, Iowa

Questions for Reflection

Whose example and words have influenced the significant decisions in your life?

How is God calling you to use your special gifts in the service of others?

“Why on this good, green earth would I want to volunteer at a place where people were *dying*? But, the hospice nurse’s talk really touched my heart.”

MINISTRY BEHIND THE SCENES

Suggested Sacred Text

Restore us, O God; Cause Your face to shine, And we shall be helped!

Psalm 80:3

Sacred Story

When you walk into a hospital, you see the employees and staff members who talk to patients, collect information from patients and care directly for them. You don't see the employees who do things "behind the scenes" to serve patients. But, because of their efforts, patients' stress and financial strain is often lessened.

One behind-the-scenes person is a pharmacist who takes the time to do the right thing for patients and make a tremendous difference in their lives. She reviews reports on patients who have to pay their hospital bills on their own or are underinsured. She tries to find pharmaceutical companies that will replace the medication given to those patients at no charge, so that the medication charges can be removed from the patients' bills. During fiscal year 2011, this pharmacist removed nearly \$350,000 from patients' bills. She also helps obtain free or reduced-cost outpatient medications for patients who would have a difficult time paying for them. She's driven by a heart of compassion and a desire to help people in their time of need.

For example, a 70-year-old man needed intravenous medications twice a day to help heal his wounds. He was poor and did not have Medicare Part D to help pay for his medications. The pharmacist and our hospital social worker worked diligently to find a way to help. The pharmacist found a drug company that would provide 60 doses of a medication that usually costs more than \$400 per dose. The social worker found a home health agency that would administer the medication to the patient in his home.

“She’s driven by a heart of compassion and a desire to help people in their time of need.”

Behind the scenes of any hospital are caring employees who make a difference and reveal the heart of God in serving others. It is the hands and feet of God, working through us, that bring relief to a patient. It is looking at our patients and seeing Christ in humility and love.

FLORA WASHBURN

*Saint Joseph Berea
Berea, Kentucky*

Questions for Reflection

Who are the silent heroes and heroines in your life and work? How can you extend gratitude to them for their service?

Where are the opportunities for you to make a difference in the lives of your patients, colleagues and family members?

FAIR WITH OCCASIONAL CLOUDS

Suggested Sacred Text

When Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who had come with her weeping, he became perturbed and deeply troubled, and said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Sir, come and see." And Jesus wept.

John 11: 33-35

Sacred Story

It was lunch time. I had just filled my coffee cup and was pressing the plastic lid onto it when an elderly man approached the coffee pot in our busy hospital café. I greeted him with a smile and genuine welcome. "How are you, Sir?"

He answered with one of the polite metaphors typical of his generation: "Fair – with occasional clouds."

He kept his head down, as if he was pondering something, while his coffee cup was filling. When the cup was full, he looked up at me. That was when I saw the clouds. A raindrop of a tear formed in the corner of his eye.

He said, "My wife has been sick for quite a while. I just came from taking her to the clinic across the way."

He paused, and had a look of remembered comfort. "It's a wonderful thing when a doctor holds your hand and has tears in her eyes when she tells you the bad news you already know."

There was a raindrop in my eye, too. We stood together under the cloud, waiting a few moments for it to pass.

“And Jesus wept” at the coffee pot, and nobody thought it was odd.

DAVID RAPP

St. Anthony Hospital

Gig Harbor, Washington

Questions for Reflection

How often are you able to share tears with others when it is appropriate?

To what degree are you able to enter into another's pain and sorrow?

“It’s a wonderful thing when a doctor holds your hand and has tears in her eyes when she tells you the bad news you already know.”

DESPERATE HOPE

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

I believe that sometimes God puts you in the right place at the right time, and in that moment you know you are in the midst of something greater than yourself. I experienced such a moment with a family that allowed me to share in their prayers, their true and desperate hope, and the faith they clung to even when things looked grim.

I was filling in on an evening shift and was unfamiliar with the floors and patients to which I was assigned. I decided to visit a man who had been admitted that day. I was greeted by a teary patient, surrounded by his concerned family. He said, “I think God sent you at the right time. I am about to go to surgery and I could use another prayer.”

I don’t remember exactly what I said that night, but I do remember a deep desire for everything to be okay for this family. After our “Amen,” the nurses whisked the patient off to surgery.

Even as my schedule changed in the following weeks, this patient and I kept ending up on the same floors. I followed his progress and checked on his attentive family. Two weeks after his surgery, he seemed overwhelmed, down in spirits, and still very ill.

I was on call for the weekend when I happened to see the patient being wheeled into the critical care unit. A few seconds later, my pager went off. The CCU secretary said a family in the waiting room was requesting a visit. I was sure I knew which family it was.

In the waiting room, I was greeted by hugs and tears from the family I had come to know during the past two weeks. The patient's wife said, "I am so relieved that you are here with us. I think God made sure you would be here."

God's presence in this situation was undeniable. I felt blessed by witnessing and being trusted to enter into the family's sacred space of anxiety, hope and love. I have confidence in my abilities as a chaplain, but this was different than feeling confident. This was experiencing God's work in me and in this family; God was working in the midst of us.

SARAH FINBOW

Penrose-St. Francis Health Services

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever found yourself in the right place at the right time?

How did you know, and what was the meaning for you?

“I felt blessed by witnessing and being trusted to enter into the family's sacred space of anxiety, hope and love.”

SPECIAL MOMENTS

Suggested Sacred Text

Abundance is... water flowing from the tap, wildflowers in a mason jar, a pink and lavender sunset sky, the smell of freshly baked chocolate chip cookies, an unexpected phone call from a friend... God is in the details.
The Art of Abundance by Candy Paull

Sacred Story

For me, praying has always been a private affair. As a child, I may have led a blessing or two before eating, but openly praying – even in front of my family – was not something I was entirely comfortable doing.

So, when I recently found a patient crying in her room, terrified of her new diagnosis (multiple myeloma) and all the unknowns that lay in front of her, I shocked myself when I offered to lead her through a moment of prayer and meditation. What was clear to me was the power of the moment. I felt that God was calling me to overcome my personal discomfort with praying out loud. I stepped out on faith, leaned into my discomfort and prayed with this patient.

I sat beside her and held her hands. I looked into her tear-filled eyes and searched for words that would ease her fear and worry. I really had no idea what I was going to say, but thankfully, a prayer I had memorized as a young adult popped into my head. Why that one and not another, I do not know. This prayer was first recited at the funeral of President Abraham Lincoln's third son, who died at age 11 from typhoid. Perhaps I memorized it for this very moment.

“What we need in the hour of trial, and what we should seek by earnest prayer, is confidence in Him who sees the end from the beginning and doeth all things well. Let us acknowledge His hand, and hear His voice, and inquire after His will, and seek the Holy Spirit as our counselor and guide, and all, in the end, will be well.”

I added some other thoughts to personalize the prayer before saying “Amen.” The patient and I sat together in silence for a minute longer, heads bowed, eyes closed. As I stood to leave, I hugged her and told her she was not alone. I told her God was holding her in a loving embrace with each breath she took. She

lifted her head and gave me a smile, and said, “You know, it was no accident that you were here at this moment. God brought you to me. Thank you for praying with me.”

Special moments like this are profoundly moving. For me, there was an immediate recognition of the mystery of God and the affirmation of God’s comfort in times of fear, loss and grief. Even though religion, faith and spirituality mean different things to each of us, they serve as the foundation for all that we do on behalf of the patients we serve. If we’re open and paying attention, these opportunities appear.

I am grateful that God was able to work through me to provide comfort to my patient. This was truly a sacred moment for both of us. Not only did God comfort her, but the experience reaffirmed my calling to compassionate nursing care.

JOANN J. BRENNAN, RN

St. Vincent Health System

Little Rock, Arkansas

Question for Reflection

Can you think of a time when you were out of your comfort zone and it turned out to be a blessing, or an abundance of blessings?

“Even though religion, faith and spirituality mean different things to each of us, they serve as the foundation for all that we do on behalf of the patients we serve.”

PART OF GOD'S PLAN

Suggested Sacred Text

God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to God's purpose.

Romans 8:28

Sacred Story

Reflecting on my morning devotion while driving to work, I wondered what the Lord had planned for me that day. Later in the morning, I saw a young man sitting outside on a park bench. Next to him was a bicycle and homemade trailer, packed with a variety of bags.

"Who's that?" I asked a coworker.

She laughingly replied, "I don't know, he said something about searching for his purpose in life. Why don't you ask him?"

"I think I will," I said and headed outside.

It was hot that day, and as I approached I saw that the young man was flushed. I noticed that he was reading the book "Conversations with God." I introduced myself and asked if there was anything he needed. He gave me a wonderful, friendly smile, and said his name was Zach. He asked if I could get him some water. I filled his empty water bottles, and he thanked me.

Zach told me that he was 20 years old and was riding his bike across the country, trying to redefine his life. I suggested that he come inside to cool off and rest. He hadn't eaten, so I offered to get him some lunch. While he ate, I purchased some items to help him on his trip. I added a copy of the New Testament and a small monetary gift to the package.

We continued our conversation, and I felt compelled to ask if he was a Christian. When he said he was not, I told him that I had assumed he was because of the book he was reading. Zach told me that he knew there was more to life than what he had seen and experienced so far. He knew some higher

power had him searching for his purpose. He asked my opinion on many spiritual matters. He asked me if I believed that everyone has gifts; and, how do we know what our gifts are? We continued to talk and I tried to answer his questions.

Zach also told me that the one thing he was sure of is that the only thing in life that really matters is love, but he was unsure how to define it. I offered to introduce him to my best friend, Jesus Christ, who loves him unconditionally.

I was more than blessed that day. God used me as part of a plan to bring the scriptures to life. I was excited to be chosen to be a reflection of God's love to a young man in search of something more — something he was able to find right here at St. Francis.

NANCY BRODINA

*St. Francis Healthcare Campus
Breckenridge, Minnesota*

Questions for Reflection

In what circumstances have you been called to be an expression of God's love?

What simple act of kindness have you done recently to ease someone's burden or brighten another's day?

“He knew some higher power had him searching for his purpose.”

THE CARING OF ANGELS

Suggested Sacred Text

Look! I am bringing the city recovery and healing; I will heal them and reveal to them an abundance of lasting peace.

Jeremiah 33:6

Sacred Story

When I arrived at work at Mercy Home Health and Hospice that Monday, I learned that the son of our colleague, Gina, had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. Gina's son had undergone six hours of emergency brain surgery on Saturday. Due to the small size and location of the tumor, the surgeon was able to remove only half of the mass. Another attempt to remove the remainder would occur in the days ahead.

Our office is very family-oriented, and we all consider Gina to be not only a coworker, but a good friend. We all had heavy hearts and a desire to keep her daughter in our prayers.

By mid-morning, Gina contacted me for information regarding family and medical leave. I offered to walk over to the intensive care unit with the requested information.

I found Gina not distraught, but joyous. She explained that her family had been praying for her son to be healed, and sadness was not an option. The family's approach was to take one day at a time and remain sure that God would provide healing.

Gina was also joyous because she had entered her son's room on Sunday to find him alert and ready to ask for salvation! "I know he is going to be all right," Gina said.

Gina told me that on Saturday evening, as she and her husband were leaving the hospital after their son's surgery, a woman approached and asked if she could pray with them. They prayed, and as quickly as the woman had appeared, she was gone. Gina and her husband had never witnessed anything like this before,

but because of the stranger's prayer, they were able to go home, sleep and return on Sunday with a fresh outlook.

As I prepared to depart from the intensive care unit, Gina's husband approached. He pointed to me and said to Gina, "I don't know if she is a believer or not, but you need to tell her about the angel who prayed with us." Gina replied, "I just did, and yes, she is a believer!"

Later that day, I met with a colleague. Feeling a need share Gina's story, I told her about the angel.

With tears rolling down her cheeks and her voice wavering, my colleague said, "That was me. I stopped to pray with them. I had been at the hospital visiting my father, and as I was leaving, a couple in front of me appeared to be having difficulties with the revolving door. I stopped to ask if they were okay. When I saw that they were upset, I felt the need to pray with them. I never did that before."

Now, I had goose bumps on my arms, a lump in my throat, and tears in my eyes. My colleague continued, "I didn't interrupt your story because I wanted to know what happened. On my way home, I cried and wished I had given them my palm cross to give to their son."

She dug into her purse. "Now that I know their son will have more surgery, I want him to have this cross. I would like him to hold this cross and pray, as I have done on several occasions," she said. "Please, will you please give this to Gina?"

I was honored to do so and to participate in this story of grace as God worked among us.

DONNA MALONE

Mercy Home Health Services

Des Moines, Iowa

Questions for Reflection

What speaks to you in this story? Have you had any similar experiences?

AN UNWELCOMED GUEST

Suggested Sacred Text

I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me: I was in prison and you came to me...

Matthew 25:31-46

Sacred Story

The blind, the lame, the leper: physical conditions in some, emotional qualities in others. Such was our experience with Juan: a man with a reputation, an “unsafe” man who pushed others away.

His manner distanced caregivers. He would lash out at staff, saying he’d use a knife if he had one with him. The staff was relieved when he left, but he returned the following day. Though his condition warranted admission, alienated staff hoped he might be treated elsewhere.

As Juan was not interested in being transferred, compassionate staff sought his readmission. During the process, a nurse wheeled him outside so that he could smoke a cigarette. Realizing that he was incapable of wheeling himself to a smoking area, I later went to his room and offered to take him outside to smoke. Surprised by the offer, Juan quickly accepted and we scheduled his daily breaks.

During Juan’s smoke breaks, he revealed details of his life between gasping struggles for breath. The story of his life touched me: the man with the abusive manner was deeply wounded by life.

As the smoke breaks continued, my care for Juan grew. When I confided to staff that he was praying with me, sharing conversation about God and eternity, their feelings about him changed. They were able to trust the changes that they, too, had seen in him.

In my last conversation with him, Juan mentioned having been awake for some hours the previous night, “just thinking” and “wanting to come closer to God.” Early the next week, he quietly slipped away.

This man left a deep impression on me. Was he one of the least of his brethren? I think he was. But, what gave him the strength to be willing to be cared for by the very individuals he had alienated? How do former “neighbors” dismiss their judgments when they suddenly become caregivers? What does it take for us to look beyond problems to the feelings and fears beneath them? What will enable us, the next time, to see the hidden, wounded face of Christ instead of someone who could hurt us?

When we hesitate, Lord, to be with another, strengthen us. When we miss the needs of one who suffers, awaken us. When we seek to run away from the call to be there, bring us back. Deepen our desire, Lord, to serve You in all of Your people.

JUDY PARSONS

*Saint Joseph Martin
Martin, Kentucky*

Questions for Reflection

How do you reach out to the poorest and most vulnerable in your community?

What is your attitude toward those whose lifestyles contribute to poor health?

“The story of his life touched me: the man with the abusive manner was deeply wounded by life.”

THE RISK OF SPEAKING UP

Suggested Sacred Text

He came to Nazareth, where he had grown up, and went according to his custom into the synagogue on the Sabbath day. He stood up to read and was handed a scroll of the prophet Isaiah. He unrolled the scroll and found the passage where it was written:

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring glad tidings to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord."*

Rolling up the scroll, he handed it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue looked intently at him. He said to them, "Today this scripture passage is fulfilled in your hearing." And all spoke highly of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth...

Luke 4:16-22

Sacred Story

Every day, as vice president of marketing at Franciscan Villa, I remind myself that my purpose is to be the voice of the customer. I believe that my number one reason to be here is to be a voice for a population that may not be able to speak up for themselves.

Every time I'm fortunate enough to meet with a hospital patient who plans to come to Franciscan Villa, I see it as a gift. The gift these patients give me is their vulnerability, their stories, and their willingness to trust me. I walk into their rooms as a scary nursing home representative and walk out as a friend, a resource, a representative of Franciscan Villa who gave them hope that they will be okay.

I take the responsibility of receiving these gifts very seriously. And, I learn from each patient I meet. What scares them? What do they look forward to? What hurts? What goals and dreams do they have? We connect, and I reassure them that Franciscan Villa is going to take care of them. We are their hope.

This is why I take the risk to speak up in front of my peers. It isn't easy to bring difficult topics to the table. I know it isn't easy because of the hours of thought I go through and the way my stomach feels before I speak up.

I speak up not only because I feel my responsibility to be the voice of our customers, but because I trust and respect the team I work with. I look around the table at a meeting and see that I am surrounded by talent and compassion for our residents.

I speak up because I believe that the more we work through a process as a team, the more we grow from it and see our residents benefit from it. And, it will be easier — not only for me, but for my peers — to speak up next time.

There is nothing we can't accomplish if we choose to respect each other, trust each other, and carry on the ministry's commitment to advocacy by being a voice for those who are vulnerable.

JILL COMPTON

Franciscan Villa

South Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Questions for Reflection

How are you a voice for the voiceless?

How do you encourage and support others to be a voice for justice and those who are vulnerable?

How do you build trust and openness within your department or organization?

A HEALING TOUCH

Suggested Sacred Text

God has made wonders to be remembered; the Lord is gracious and compassionate. God has given food to those who fear; God will remember the covenant forever.

Psalm 111:4-5

Sacred Story

We all have boundaries, and many of us feel uncomfortable when someone invades our personal space, especially if it's someone we don't know. To give up that space to help someone else is a true sign of selfless, unconditional love.

As the overnight shift administrator, I see the staff on 4 West working with elderly patients who have Alzheimer's disease. Night can be especially difficult for these patients, who are in a strange place. They can become very agitated. To ensure the safety of patients who are especially confused or upset, staff will move their beds to the nursing station.

While making rounds one Friday night, I saw a nursing assistant sitting next to one of these patients. She was working a computer on a wheeled cart. She was doing her job of charting patient information while sitting next to the patient to keep him company, so that he wouldn't try to get out of bed.

Her chair was close enough to the bed that the patient could touch her. She let him gently touch her head and shoulder as he spoke to her, believing she was someone else. She spoke softly to him, as well, and this soothed the patient. Her loving interaction with the patient went on for quite a while, until his restlessness evaporated and he finally fell asleep.

The gentle caring displayed by the nursing assistant was a vision of pure goodness and Godliness. Saint Clare's mission is carried out with fidelity to the Gospel which, in essence, is continuing the healing ministry of Jesus. I truly witnessed the love of Jesus glowing from the kind and gentle heart of our nursing assistant.

LISA YANCEY

Saint Clare's Hospital/Dover

Dover, New Jersey

Questions for Reflection

Have you ever clearly known that you were doing God's work? How did it feel?

“She let him gently touch her head and shoulder as he spoke to her, believing she was someone else.”

