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*A Theology
of the
Health Care Ministry*

That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing together, Jesus himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What is this conversation which you are holding with each other as you walk?" And they stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, named Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" And he said to them, "What things?" And they said to him, "Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since this happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning and did not find his body; and they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb, and found it just as the women had said; but him they did not see." And he said to them, "O foolish men, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ would suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself. So they drew near to the village to which they were going. He appeared to be going further, but they constrained him saying, "Stay with us, for it is toward evening and the day is now far spent." So he went in to stay with them, he took bread and blessed, and broke it and gave it to them. And their eyes were opened and they recognized him; and he vanished out of their sight. They said to each other, "Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?" And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven gathered together and those who were with them, who said, "The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!" Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Luke 24: 13-35

Over the past one hundred years, Catholic health care has grown to become collectively the largest provider of health care in the United States. The past century was well served by a model of health care based upon the image of the Good Samaritan. Based upon a theology that believed in the inherent dignity and inestimable worth of every human being, a health care system was developed to respond to individual needs. The Good Samaritan responded to the immediate acute needs of the individual within a given situation. Once an individual need was identified, Catholic health care, like the Good Samaritan, responded with the utmost compassion. The model presumed that there would always be the necessary resources to meet all the needs of those who presented themselves for care. As long as there were adequate resources the needs of all could be met. However, the paradigm failed to ask how the injuries may have been prevented and presumed that the Samaritan had unlimited resources and would always find room at the inn.

Christian Theology: the science that seeks to understand and to continually rearticulate the life-giving good News of God in Christ Jesus.

The paradigm's emphasis on an individual responding to another individual is a necessary dimension of a compassionate health care system. However, today's health care delivery system requires a more relevant and complex model. The past thirty years have revealed remarkable change within health care. Not only have medical and technological advances changed the face of health care but the entire infrastructure of health care is being transformed. The changing

environment is requiring a new paradigm, a new model of health care delivery. The paradigm of the Good Samaritan does not adequately address institutional response to the needs of the community. It is not enough to band together scores of Good Samaritans serving the health care needs of the community. The realities of today call for a radical change from the past.

To develop and articulate a new paradigm of the health care ministry is to “do theology.” It is an on-going process engaging us to reflect upon our experience of each other and of God, the Creator, the Redeemer and the Spirit. To “do theology” is to develop a coherent framework of our lived experience and ultimately to understand what it means to be human, to be created in the image and likeness of God. This reflection includes both individual and collective experiences. The health care ministry is rich with experiences that engage us at the most profound depths of our humanity.

Whether we are providing or receiving health care, we experience each other at some of the most vulnerable and frail moments of our lives. A theology of the health care ministry attempts to bring wholeness to our brokenness. This theology becomes unique to Catholic Health Initiatives as it develops in the lived experience of the people of CHI.

It becomes obvious that if we want to make relatively minor changes in our lives, we can perhaps appropriately focus on our attitudes and behaviors. But if we want to make significant, quantum change, we need to work on our basic paradigm.

S. Covey

A new paradigm may be based upon the experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus. The story begins with the disciples in a general state of

confusion. Left to their own devices, they are unable to understand their contemporary experience. They are headed away from Jerusalem and along the road they encounter a “stranger”. Even with the resurrected Jesus revealing the meaning of their lives, they fail to understand his words until the breaking of the bread. It is only in this communal event that they understand the truth. It is at this point that they become sacrament to each other. They were broken, now they are whole; lost, now found. They had died, but now they are risen to a new life. The mystery of their own lives and of their life together is now revealed to them. Their lives are now inextricably woven together. They become more than a collection of individuals; they become a community. So filled with the good news that their hearts are burning within them, they cannot but witness to the Good News!

*But chaos continues to exist...it can seem to get the upper hand...But God's creative work is ongoing. God continues to order the chaos we encounter...
J. Bernardin*

Imagine their conversation now on the road to Jerusalem, the insights they gained, the plans they made, seeing the world in an entirely new light, coming to an understanding that the old had passed away and yet unsure as to what was to replace it. But filled with such faith and zeal, they could not keep themselves silent. They could not refrain from action. They knew in their hearts that they must proclaim the Good News and build the kingdom even though they did not know what lay around the next bend.

Where are we on this road? Do we find ourselves in Jerusalem filled with the Spirit or scattered amongst the doubtful in Emmaus? What Good News do we proclaim? How do we build the kingdom?

Proclaiming the Good News: the role of prophet

The disciples knew that Jerusalem was filled with risk, for in this place, just days ago, Jesus was executed. Jesus himself was well aware of the risks of prophecy. He, like the prophets of old, was an interpreter of his time. As a prophet, Jesus not only proclaimed a new way of looking at the world, a new message, but he became the message. Prophets en flesh the message that they proclaim. By this incarnational dynamic, prophets call people to accountability. The prophet realizes that this call may not receive a favorable response.

Jesus envisioned community differently from his experienced reality. He proclaimed a Good News which challenged people to see the world in a different way, to turn their lives around. Jesus called the people from their present day comfort to live the Beatitudes, to care for one another as if they were caring for him. Jesus called people to realize that the Good News is in each one of them.

Jesus' call to proclaim the Good News was not only for his disciples in Jerusalem but goes forth to all who hear the call. We are called to proclaim the Good News, to be the prophets of today. Not only must we decide whether we shall join the community in Jerusalem or continue on the road to Emmaus, but if we choose Jerusalem, we shall be faced with the continual challenge of proclaiming the Good News, of enfleshing the message. Along this road there

are multiple diversions that result in our ongoing dying and rising. We are continually broken and made whole.

It is one thing for an individual to prophesy but it is entirely different for an organization to be a prophet. To be a prophetic organization is to allow all members of the community to articulate the prophesy, to form the vision, to en flesh the message. The prophetic organization not only challenges the external structures of the community but also challenges itself. It is in a continuous process of self-learning and development and its internal structures not only allow but encourage questioning. The prophetic organization, like the individual prophet, is in a constant process of dying and rising, of rejuvenating itself in order to more clearly and consistently proclaim its Good News. This process is inherently humbling because it presumes the possibility of mistakes. But this is all right because we realize that “now we know in part, but then we shall understand fully.”

“Why are we in this business? ...For our own healing.”

R. Greenleaf

Building the Kingdom: the role of servant

In Jerusalem, the disciples will not only proclaim the Good News, but they will also be faced with the challenge of building the kingdom. How will they “release those who are captive,” “give sight to those who are blind” and “set free those who are oppressed?” It is in the lived experience of the community that the kingdom of God is built. Jesus not only ministered to the physical needs of the

community by feeding, healing and touching, but he also served the community's spiritual needs by listening, forgiving and redeeming.

The experience of Jerusalem calls us to serve. To truly serve the needs of the community, we cannot build just one aspect of the kingdom but we must build the entire kingdom. We are called to address the physical, social and spiritual needs of the community. To truly serve the needs of the community, we cannot serve only certain members of the community but must serve all members, the most powerful and the most vulnerable. And just what does it mean to promote a healthy community?

The servant organization places the needs of the community before its own needs. It does not exist solely for its own survival but rather for the enhancement of the community. Regardless of whether it produces "widgets" or provides health services, the servant organization exists in order to promote the well being of the community. The servant organization strives to understand the needs of the community from the community's perspective rather than from its own bias. The servant organization does not desire the community to become dependent upon the organization but rather for the community and the organization to become interdependent. If the organization is truly serving the community's needs, the community will in some fashion form the organization. The servant organization does not remain aloof from the community but becomes integrated into the life of the community. By truly serving, both the organization and the community become whole.

Good News and Kingdom: the prophetic servant

To combine the role of prophet with the role of servant may at first appear contradictory because as servant we are involved in ministering to the everyday needs of the community while as prophet we are engaged with the community in revealing a richer and deeper understanding of itself and of life. As servant we are caring for those who are poor and vulnerable from the very beginning of life to the final moment of death. As prophet we are challenging the community and ourselves to examine how we have structured our lives and how to fashion new wineskins.

“Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures.”

To be a truly effective prophet we must be well versed in the day-to-day experience of the servant lest our words fall on deaf ears. And to be a truly effective servant we must allow ourselves to dream new dreams, otherwise our service will not meet the changing needs of the community. The challenge is to integrate both the prophesying and the service. The challenge is to be a prophetic servant. This requires a continual reflection upon the call we have received and our response to that call.

To provide prophetic service to another involves not only ministering to the person’s physical, spiritual and social needs but also involves challenging the structures that contributed to the person’s ill health in the first place. As a prophetic servant, we desire not only to gather up and care for the sick and injured but to minister to the whole person. We serve in a way that others may

grow as persons, that they themselves are more likely to become servants, to become whole. We seek not only the health of individuals but the health and welfare of the entire community. We realize that if one member of the community suffers, then the entire community suffers. The community thrives as individuals thrive.

Just as Jesus was critical of the existing structures of his time and judged them to not fully serve the needs of the community, we need to be critical of the current health care system and to advocate for a system that serves all members of the community. Jesus did not stop with a criticism of the existing structures but offered an alternative one. His was not a mission of merely tearing down but also involved building up. As prophets we proclaim the message of a constant dying and rising. This message needs to be heard both individually and corporately in order for community to be fully realized, the kingdom to be fulfilled.

Conclusion

Why are we in health care today? The answer is quite simple. We are in health care to proclaim the Good News, to give witness to God's presence in the world. We are in health care to build the kingdom, to show a genuine concern and compassion for all people, to bring wholeness to our lives. But why have this concern at all? We have a genuine concern for persons because of the mere fact that they are persons. If we believe that every person is created in the image and likeness of God, that every encounter with another person is an

encounter with Jesus, then how can we not care for them, how can we not reverence them? How can our hearts not burn within us?

Like the Good Samaritan, we gather up the injured and bind their wounds. However, we not only attend to the needs of the individual but also seek ways to prevent this misfortune from happening to others. If the causes originate within our community then we call this to the community's attention. We go to Jerusalem knowing there is risk but our "hearts are burning within us" and we know what we need to do. We proclaim the Good News and build the kingdom, we are prophet and servant. We rejoice that we have witnessed God's presence in the world and we wait for the Spirit.

Catholic Health Initiatives

A Theology of the Catholic Health Care Ministry

Reflection Questions

Personal Reflection

1. On the road to Emmaus the disciples who had previously heard Jesus' invitation, "Come follow me," received a second call. They discovered a new sense of direction in their interaction with the stranger on the journey, in their exchange of stories and in the breaking of the bread. As a result their ministry made a difference to many near and far.

How do you understand Jesus' invitation, "Come, follow me."?

Where do you find yourself, in Emmaus or Jerusalem?

2. A second call to discipleship generally occurs in the midst of confusion and complexity and when a person's faith and philosophy of life have matured.

When have you experienced a renewal of vocation or a second call?

In your healing ministry what are the circumstances of your second call?

Corporate Reflection

1. CHI functions not as a group of individuals but as a corporate body, a community of persons. As a corporate culture develops, this community of persons can speak with one voice.

What does it mean for us to be a "prophetic servant," either personally or organizationally?

2. To be "re-membered" is to be reconnected in a new way.

How do we "re-member" each other and those we serve?

3. The experience of the disciples on the road to Emmaus ends with their forming a community in Jerusalem and waiting for the Holy Spirit.

How should we conduct this ministry into the future? What should this ministry "look like" ten years from now?

What are the new horizons or opportunities for ministry when we dialogue with others outside of our immediate work group?