



Medicine & Morals

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Editor's Note

An earlier edition of Medicine and Morals, Fr. Leo Walsh discussed the difference between distinctiveness and specific difference. He explains, "Distinctiveness refers to what is essential to an institution without comparison to other institutions. So, a Catholic hospital, for example, must show compassion to all or it is not deserving of the name 'Catholic'. Secular hospitals may also include compassion in their mission statements, and we are delighted by that. In a Catholic hospital, 'specific difference' makes a claim that the institution has something that marks it off from other institutions". In the following article, Fr. Mickey Prieur reveals to us a matter of specific difference. His article was written for the Health Ethics Guide, Third Edition, 2012, Catholic Health Association of Canada.

Eucharistic Vision

Fr. Michael Prieur

There is one aspect that makes a Catholic health care facility specifically different from all other similar facilities: "its vision of the sick is a eucharistic vision, carried out in all details of the treatment of the patient and the mission of the healing team" (Ashley 1996). The understanding and application of this can have many levels of meaning.

"Eucharist" is a Greek word meaning "gratitude" or "thanksgiving". Life, health, healing, compassion, all are ultimately gifts from God. Working with this basic eucharistic vision grounds us in a loving gratitude of God in being co-responsible for these gifts. As a result, we approach the work of health care with humble hands and hearts.

For Christians and especially Catholics, "Eucharistic vision" denotes the closeness of God in our everyday lives, especially the presence of Christ. It specifically denotes the loving sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross for us and his resurrection from the dead, all foreshadowed by the gift of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. This eucharistic vision is symbolized in the crucifix on the walls of Catholic health care facilities. It is real in the healing presence of Jesus in the sacraments,

namely the celebration of the Eucharist, prayer services with the Word of God, the bringing of communion to the sick, as

well as the celebration of the sacrament of penance, the sacrament of the sick



(anointing), and the sacrament of the dying (communion, called “Viaticum”, or “Food for the [final] journey”).

Eucharistic vision underlies that spirit of charity and compassion which we have stressed in this whole guide. Christians, and specifically Catholics, believe this closeness of God is also the hidden but powerful presence of Christ in the loving prayers, treatment and support given by care givers to each person seeking healing.

This whole attitude can well be in the hearts and hands of everyone, since it ultimately comes from God. This vision is available to all without suggesting that it would be imposed on anyone. In sum, a Eucharistic Vision is a true, gratuitous blessing of charity present in the very ethos of a Catholic health care facility.

With Humble Hearts and Hands: Volunteers Living Out the Eucharist Vision.

Maria Giannotti BE, MA, MSB

Throughout Church history, healing the sick and caring for the vulnerable have always been concrete ways in which Christians have lived out the Gospel. This vital apostolate is firmly grounded in early Christian communities and tradition. This tradition continues to inspire those who work in Catholic healthcare, guiding their minds and hearts in the continuation of the healing ministry begun by Christ. Through compassionate healthcare services, they seek to reveal the healing presence of God. As providers of healthcare, outreach services and palliative care, HDGH is committed to

uphold the sacredness of life and honour the vital link between spirituality and healing, not only through their staff, but through their dedicated volunteers as well.



At Hotel-Dieu Grace Healthcare more than 600 men, women and young people are actively working to help fulfill the vision, mission and values of the organization. These volunteers truly personify the core values of HDGH; their compassion, dedication, commitment to team work and respect demonstrate everyday how one person’s actions can make a significant difference in someone’s life.

On March 26th I had the opportunity to witness first-hand the impact of volunteers. As I attended the St. Joseph Day Mass, I witnessed compassionate words and gentle hugs given to vulnerable or distraught patients. I saw men and women joyfully in service to others. The Eucharistic Vision so eloquently described by Fr. Prieur was clearly evident that day. The experience was so touching that I asked permission to interview some of the volunteers in order to gain a better understanding of their motivation for the work they do with such joy.



An integral part of Hotel-Dieu Grace for more almost a century, volunteers make a significant contribution to

the hospital, in terms of their time, talents and the donations they help to generate. Working side by side with the professional staff these volunteers are present in nearly every area of the hospital. When a faith-based health care organization accepts the services of volunteers, it enters a relationship that arises out of a sense of mission, and the essence of that relationship is ministry. A Catholic institution's mission will often serve as a magnet, attracting the best and most dedicated volunteers. Hotel-Dieu Grace Healthcare exemplifies this in the men and women and young people who volunteer there.

The volunteers who spoke with me work with the Spiritual Care department as Eucharistic Ministers. They support the spiritual health of patients, families, and staff, as well as help to ensure that the mission, values and Catholic identity are made visible throughout our organization.

Every volunteer has a story, a reason for serving. For those who volunteer at Hotel-Dieu-Grace Healthcare, it means taking part in the ministry of Catholic healthcare and continuing Christ's healing ministry. They spoke passionately about their faith, about the patients and families, about the benefits they receive from volunteering and about a sense of community. They are "fiercely proud of our faith-based hospital" and of the spiritual dimension of care given to those who enter Hotel-Dieu Grace Healthcare.



One volunteer shared, *"I was a nurse for 34 years, volunteering gave me a focus and purpose again. I get more out of this than they do. Bringing the Eucharist to patients and families is such an honour."*



Another shared, *"Doing good is important and what I do matters. It makes the world is a better place, not only for the patients, staff and family, but for me as well."*

All of them agreed that volunteering was not only life-giving, but life-transforming. Volunteering is always reciprocal: there are benefits to both the person giving and those receiving, and it is this mutuality that is also a fundamental condition for volunteering to work so effectively.

Because volunteers are not paid for their work, they have a unique relationship with the organization. They come to it seeking a sense of community and fellowship. This was a common theme amongst the volunteers. They view the organization as the Community sees it – as a source of service not compensation, and because they view themselves as community members and not employees they identify closely with patients and families.

These volunteers know that none of us walks alone on this journey that we call life. They are also keenly aware that we come to know *who we are* and *what we are* by being with others, by being in community. The reflection of one volunteer summed it up perfectly, *"I am the person I most want to be*

when I am here serving the patients and their families."

In a faith-based organization, people support each other in the search to bring healing in whatever form it may take. They come for the patients, the staff and for one another. They clearly understand that compassion always reveals itself in community and that we witness to God's compassionate presence in the world by the way we live and work together. (McNeill, Morrison, Nouwen, 1981).

Healthcare is holy ground, "it is a place of healing and of suffering, of risk and of care. It is where the divine is revealed in the events of our lives" (Casey 1991). Regardless of how or where we serve, the most important element is to remember our obligation as Christians to bring Christ to others.

Inspired by the founding congregation and their Sponsor, the staff and volunteers continue the tradition of Catholic health care by sharing in a call to reveal the goodness and love of God for all people. Together with the leadership and staff, they work to build a world where hope and compassion prevail.

If you are interested in volunteering at Hotel-Dieu Grace Healthcare all you need is a willingness to help people, a little time to share and a desire challenge yourself. Your

gift of time and energy would be invaluable to patients and staff.

Contact Volunteer Services at the following:

Email-volunteerservices@hdgh.org

Phone: (519) 257-5111 ext. 73184

Monday - Friday, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m.

"Whatever you did for one of
the least of these brothers of mine,
you did for me." Matthew 25:40

References & Resources

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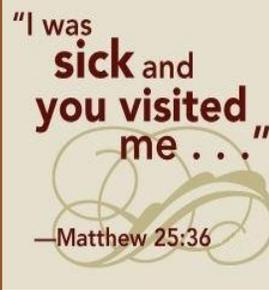
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"I was
sick and
you visited
me . . ."
—Matthew 25:36