



Sacred stories

ELEVENTH EDITION



† CATHOLIC HEALTH
INITIATIVES®

A spirit of innovation, a legacy of care.



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Introduction

Catholic Health Initiatives is pleased to begin the second decade of *Sacred Stories* with this 11th edition. The first 10 editions shared hundreds of stories that give witness to a culture and care delivery system in which God's Spirit is evident. In this edition, we seek to enhance each reader's reflective experience by including a scripture passage or other sacred text before many of the stories. Reflecting on such passages offers a way of linking today's stories with the story of God's action in the world.

Those who serve in our ministry find *Sacred Stories* helpful for personal reflection. With this edition, we are offering readers a structured reflection process that can be used to start the day or begin a meeting.

The proclamation of scripture or sacred text creates a space where we can read, interpret and understand our work in the larger story of God's acting and being in the world. This preface, followed by the reading of the sacred story, helps illuminate the many ways our workplace is graced with God's presence.

After the sacred story has been read, the group can take some time to explore the reflection questions found at the end of each story. Since the ninth edition, these questions have been provided to facilitate conversation and exploration toward common meaning. Each person can be invited to share their thoughts, insights and experiences as the group listens.

Finally, the reflection can be brought to a close with a spontaneous prayer expressing gratitude to God for the insights gained, and for help to enable the insights in our work and in our lives.

This type of reflective process, together with the sacred stories themselves, provides Catholic Health Initiatives' organizations with resources that support reflective leadership and spirituality in our workplace. They also inspire individual and organizational participation in managing the legacy of caring passed on to us by the congregations of women religious who formed these ministries.

Foreword

Each day of work at Catholic Health Initiatives is made up of ordinary moments and tasks. Some of us greet patients, help them register for services, diagnose their conditions, provide bedside care or deliver ancillary services. Some of us prepare meals for our patients and residents or provide them with a clean, welcoming environment. Still others reach out to our communities, track finances or make operational decisions.

Whatever our roles, God is always present with us and present to us. These stories remind us of that, and make us more aware of how God works with us and through us as we perform those ordinary, everyday tasks in our health care ministry.

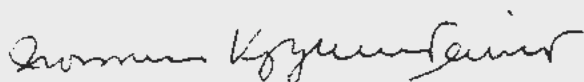
Sacred Stories captures some of these moments of heightened awareness — moments of lived spirituality that reveal God's divine presence in our workplace. They advance our faith and commitment to the Catholic health ministry. They illustrate how our lived spirituality enriches the care we provide and the environment in which we provide it.

As always, we thank the authors who, bravely, are willing to write out their personal sacred stories so that all of us can share, enjoy and learn from them. Describing moments of spiritual awareness is not always simple or easy, and we appreciate your special efforts to do so.

We hope you enjoy this collection of *Sacred Stories* and will consider contributing a story of your own to a future edition.



KEVIN E. LOFTON, FACHE
President and Chief Executive Officer, Catholic Health Initiatives



THOMAS R. KOPFENSTEINER, STD
Senior Vice President, Mission, Catholic Health Initiatives

SAVING EDWIN

Suggested Sacred Text

At sunset, all who had people sick with various diseases brought them to Him. He laid His hands on each of them and cured them. — Luke 4:40

Sacred Story

All our lives, we are told that God will equip us with what we need. Rarely do we actually believe that until something big happens. I became a believer on June 10, 2009, while on a mission trip in Cochabamba, Bolivia, where I was using my emergency technician skills as a volunteer.

Early one morning, we were woken up and told we were needed in the emergency room. A bus had wrecked in La Paz: It was a massive, 44-passenger accident. Twelve people were dead on arrival. The wounded were rushed to our three-bed emergency room. We received seven patients from the first buggy, all of them critically injured.

There was one man I will never forget. His name was Edwin. We pulled him out of the buggy and put him in a wheelchair. He looked like he had been burned from head to toe, but it was just blood from several deep cuts — and from the man who died next to him. Edwin's hands were mangled and so was his head. The nurses inserted an IV for fluids, then wheeled him to X-ray.

In the X-ray room, another volunteer hung the bag of saline on an ER bed; however, the radiology tech didn't see it and when she pushed the bed out of the way, Edwin's IV needle came with it. There was no one available to insert the IV needle again, as the nurses were attending to the rest of the critically injured patients.

Edwin was going downhill fast. Another worker looked at me, handed me an 18-gauge needle and said, "Go for it." I couldn't use either of Edwin's hands, his forearms or the vein in the depression in front of his right elbow — the antecubital space — where the first IV insertion had been. I had one chance to insert an 18-gauge needle into his left antecubital space.

Nothing in me hesitated, because I knew it had to be done. At that moment, God worked through me and became my hands. God equipped me with what I needed. There's no way I could have done it alone, especially because I'm not trained to start IVs. But, God had a different plan. In any situation, if you rely on God you'll never go wrong.

Edwin is now with his family, almost fully recovered. God's knowledge, grace and experience helped me that day. May every one of you be in a situation where you must rely on God to do what would be impossible alone.

KATHERINE VAUGHAN
Saint Joseph Hospital
Lexington, Kentucky

Question for Reflection

How is God working through my hands?

“In any situation, if you
rely on God you'll never
go wrong.”

BEING WHERE GOD COULD USE ME MOST

Suggested Sacred Text

Mary at the Foot of the Cross — John 19:16-27

Sacred Story

The day started out like any other in Labor and Delivery. I was privileged to labor with a beautiful couple expecting their second baby boy. Delivery happened without incident, but from the moment that little boy entered the world, things changed drastically. His body was limp and lifeless.

A little voice in my head said “You must breathe for that baby.” I took him to the warmer and began to ventilate him with the mask. The newborn refused to breathe on his own. I could feel his strong little heart continue to pump, but his lungs wouldn’t inflate unless I helped them.

That baby was whisked away to the NICU, and I was left with the parents to answer their questions. I didn’t have answers and could only share tears and prayers with them. Had I missed something? Were there problems with her pregnancy? Did the baby have something very wrong with his brain? We didn’t know.

The answers were slow in coming, but we knew that this little life was slowly fading away. After many weeks, genetic tests came back that gave us the news we had feared most. The little boy would slowly worsen until all of his muscles, including his heart, would just stop functioning.

The parents had to make the hardest decision of their lives. They chose to remove the baby from the ventilator and let him die in peace.

I was devastated and didn’t understand why this would happen. I prayed constantly that the family would feel God’s hand touching their lives and that their faith would sustain them. When it was time for the funeral, I was there, but I didn’t expect the gift I received from the family.

They sought me out, hugged me and thanked me for giving their baby breath. That breath allowed them to have their child for a short time. They thanked me for the gift of life and for being where God could use me most. I will never forget those words.

They taught me that even on ordinary days, miracles happen, and to see that each day is a precious gift. It has helped me put my whole world in perspective, knowing that the stressors of this world are but for a moment, but the miracles of the moments are for a lifetime. I bless the little boy and God for the lessons they have taught me in living and in dying. The little boy's funeral card is a visual reminder of that very truth.

PEGGY CLINE, RN
Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center
Lincoln, Nebraska

Question for Reflection

How do I care when I can no longer cure?

“The stressors of this world are but for a moment, but the miracles of the moments are for a lifetime.”

TRUST IN THE LORD AND THE GLOW WILL SHOW

Suggested Sacred Text

But Jesus looked at them and said to them, “With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” — Matthew 19:26

Sacred Story

I arrived at Catholic Health Initiatives almost three years ago. As I look back, I can see the journey the Lord set me on and how He intended to use me during my stay on this earth. Years ago, after dealing with many tragedies in my life, I began to see a pattern. I could see that God was by my side every step of the way, leading me, guiding me and giving me strength to go on, take action and not be afraid of the next bend in the road.

Do you ever stop to look back on your life to reflect on how you got where you are and the role God played in that journey? Do you pray for something, then not notice when you receive the answer in the form of an article you read, a song you hear or something a co-worker shares? Do you realize that the coworkers who offer you kind words, smiles and caring are really angels sent to travel with you for a while?

At this point in my life I reflect a lot on the past, looking back on my journey with its many twists, turns and bends in the road. I have come to see that the tragedies I’ve experienced — the deaths of my parents and my oldest daughter, the loss of dear friends, financial concerns and more — didn’t shatter me. Instead, they made me stronger, with a special love for life and the knowledge that there’s nothing that I and the Lord can’t handle. I have come to know that if I put my trust in God, I’ll be all right.

I wake each morning thanking God for another day and asking God to be with me as I face whatever is in store. Many people who know my life story ask how I can be so jolly and smiling all the time. It’s because I know the secret: Trust in the Lord and the glow will show.

Four years ago, I watched in awe as the Lord set me on the path to Catholic Health Initiatives. Though I didn't know it when I interviewed for this job, the Lord knew this would be a place where I could find happiness in a job I love, surrounded by caring people who teach me. Having grown up Catholic, when I came to my first interview and saw the crucifix in the entry and pictures of sisters on the conference room walls, I knew this was the place I wanted to be. By trusting in God, God made it happen for me. I am so grateful that I have come home.

ANN-MARIE JACKSON

Catholic Health Initiatives

Denver, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

Am I using my God-given talents to serve as God is calling me to serve? If not, how will I make time to listen to God's call to me?

How have my life experiences prepared me for my current work?

“Do you realize that the coworkers who offer you kind words, smiles and caring are really angels sent to travel with you for a while?”

BRAHMS' LULLABY

Suggested Sacred Text

Let the children come to me, do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of God. — Mark 10:14

Sacred Story

One of my favorite Christmas movies is “It’s a Wonderful Life.” At the end, when George realizes that everyone’s life is important, a bell on the Christmas tree rings and Zuzu says, “Daddy, teacher says every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings.”

Here at St. Catherine Hospital, we have our own way of announcing a special event. Every time a baby is born in the hospital, “Brahms’ Lullaby” plays on the intercom system. It even plays twice for twins, three times for triplets and so on. A few years ago, the music got stuck and played on and on. One of our administrators was excited, thinking that a multiple birth was occurring! I think she was rather disappointed when she discovered it was a malfunction.

Every time I hear the lullaby, I hear my grandmother say, “The poor thing, just think of all they have ahead of them.” She didn’t really pity newborns, but she never failed to utter that phrase when a new baby entered our family. I believe that as a survivor of the Great Depression, she thought babies might face the same challenges in their lives.

My grandmother was great. She was also a great-grandmother, and eventually a great-great-grandmother. Each generation and each new baby brought her much joy. Each time I hear “Brahms’ Lullaby,” I think of her and how lucky we were to have her in our lives for 96 years.

As health care providers, our days can provide challenges: too many patients, too few staff, budget crunches — the list goes on. But, when “Brahms’ Lullaby” fills the air, we know a blessed event has happened and the future looks bright.

It has been said that it takes a village to raise a child. The St. Catherine village is a strong one that cares from “Brahms’ Lullaby” to “Amazing Grace.” The next time you hear the lullaby, take a moment to say a prayer for that baby and its village and remember that everyone is here not by chance, but by God’s choosing.

DONNA HIPPI, RN
*St. Catherine Hospital
Garden City, Kansas*

Question for Reflection

As you reflect on the joy expressed in welcoming a new child into the world, how might this help inform how we welcome new employees; or, new patients and their families?

“The St. Catherine village
is a strong one that cares
from ‘Brahms’ Lullaby’
to ‘Amazing Grace.’”

CARING FOR CLAUDIA

Suggested Sacred Text

I thank my God every time I remember you. — Philippians 1:3

Sacred Story

A little more than a year ago, our office experienced the best and the worst that can happen, all within a few hours. We celebrated the birth of a baby boy and mourned the tragic loss of his mother. The mother was a beautiful young woman with the best part of her life in front of her. She had been married only a few years, but she and her husband decided to bring a baby into the world. She wasn't sure, at first, what kind of a mother she would be, but I think she surprised herself with the feelings she had for her baby boy right from the start. Soon, she was poking him if he didn't move for a few minutes just to make sure he was OK. She interviewed doctors, toured hospitals, took classes and did everything that a mom-to-be should do. She was so looking forward to the joys of being a mom. Unfortunately, God had something else in mind and took her home to Him.

That we lost her was heartbreaking. She touched many lives, in wonderful ways. We will never forget her and will always miss her.

However, this story really begins after her death. It is about the outpouring of support, comfort and love that was sent to our office and to her family via phone calls, emails, letters, flowers and cards from other CHI national offices, MBOs and past employees. Her husband and family were moved by CHI's caring ways. In the words of her mother, "Claudia was my most precious gift. At the celebration of her life and via emails, cards and letters, I discovered that all of you appreciated her, respected her and discovered in her the woman I was so proud to call my daughter. For your generous words and kindness, I will be eternally grateful."

“Her husband and family were moved by CHI’s caring ways.”

Sometimes, working in an office, miles away from any health care facility, it’s hard to feel a part of the healing ministry. This experience brought home the fact that by practicing the core values of CHI, all of us can make a difference in someone’s life.

KATHY HARMON
Catholic Health Initiatives
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Questions for Reflection

What do I hear in this story about our workplace culture?

What do I hear about relationships and caring at work?

THROUGH HIS EYES

Suggested Sacred Text

Sing a New Song! — Psalm 98

Sacred Story

There was a patient who was a kind man. He was strong, stoic, a non-complainer. He was close to his family and spoke fondly of his wife. He believed in the four Fs: Faith, Family, Friends and Farming. His family was very close and had recently suffered the loss of a loved one to cancer. He also had cancer, along with complications, and was dying himself. There was so much expression in his eyes. Through his eyes, you could see his soul and his feelings; his pain, love and kindness.

I had the privilege of being his nurse several days in a row. His wife was supportive and kind. She came every day, sat with him and held his hand. I asked if I could sing some songs to him and she said, “Certainly.” I sang “The Lord’s Prayer,” “The Old Rugged Cross,” “How Great Thou Art” and “In the Garden.” At times, the family was present, and at times it was just the two of us. Both he and the family appeared to enjoy the singing.

As he grew weaker, the family took turns staying with him. One day, as I gave him a breathing treatment, I noticed that his breathing changed. His son had stepped out of the room, and I told my aide to have him return. I began singing “The Lord’s Prayer.” The patient’s eyes were wide open, staring into mine as he held my hand. His son held his other hand and spoke in his ear. He told his father of the great love he and the rest of the family had for him. He said, “Dad, don’t be afraid, Jesus is waiting to take you home, and there will be fresh pie for you made by Barb,” who had just passed away from cancer.

I finished the song. His son said, “Please keep singing, he seems to like it.” So, I kept singing, and he stared into my eyes until he took his last breath. His son hugged me and cried. He thanked me for the songs; he said they helped him make it through the final moments of his dad’s life.

The patient's wife and his other children came to say their last goodbyes. His wife said, "My son told me you sang to my husband before he passed away — thank you." I told her it was my pleasure. Through his eyes I saw love, kindness, sadness and fear; then calmness and joy; and last of all, peace.

DEBRIA CARNAHAN

Lisbon Area Health Services

Lisbon, North Dakota

“At times, the family was present, and at times it was just the two of us. Both he and the family appeared to enjoy the singing.”

Questions for Reflection

What talents or abilities do I have that can be used to serve others?

What do my eyes express about my soul today?

LEARNING OF FAITH AND FRIENDSHIP

Suggested Sacred Text

You are my friends if you do what I command you. — John 15:14

Sacred Story

During her four years as an oncology nurse, Mary has learned a great deal about life. She has also experienced the grace of transforming from a caregiver to a friend. “When you go to nursing school, they tell you there will be good days, bad days and sad days,” she said. “But they don’t teach you about the friendships that can develop with your patients, and that you can make a difference in their lives.”

In her short time as a nurse, Mary has seen good days and bad days — from patients being baptized to patients being given the Sacrament of the Sick.

Vicki, a wife and mother of four, had successfully kept cancer at bay for 30 years when she became one of Mary’s first patients. The two developed a bond during Vicki’s multiple stays in the hospital. They soon discovered that they shared the same birthday, November 3. Mary admired Vicki’s faith and how it “gave her the strength to fight cancer for so long,” she said. “God can work in such mysterious ways.”

Mary’s own faith is one reason she came to work for Alegent Health. “That’s one of the great things about working here,” reflected Mary. “You can pray with patients openly and talk, if they want to, about their faith.”

When Vicki came to the hospital for outpatient chemotherapy, she and her family would stop on Mary’s floor to see her. The bond they developed was not only a gift to Mary and Vicki, but to Vicki’s family as well.

When Vicki was transferred to hospice care, Mary worked with her to record video messages to her family. Vicki began with a message to her husband, Neil. She told him he was her best friend and she loved him very much. She struggled to find the right words to say to her children, so she and Mary talked it through. Eventually, she used her love of flowers — telling them that in years to come, “When you see daisies, remember that I am with you.”

About a week after making that recording, Vicki passed away.

Mary has learned from her work with Vicki and other patients. She knows that every patient she touches has loved ones that she also touches — that everything she does makes a difference in someone’s life.

JODI HOATSON

Alegent Health

Omaha, Nebraska

Question for Reflection

How does care of the patient also become an extension of the healing love of God?

“Mary has learned a great deal about life. She has also experienced the grace of transforming from a caregiver to a friend.”

WE MAKE A LIFE BY WHAT WE GIVE

Sacred Story

I met Maxine on my first day of work at Saint Clare's Hospital. I was nervous about starting a new job, but Maxine's pleasant demeanor put me at ease. Since that day nearly five years ago, I have come to realize the spiritual heart of volunteering.

Maxine has been a volunteer at Saint Clare's Hospital for more than 30 years, and for the past 10 she has volunteered in the pathology department where I work. Every Tuesday and Thursday, Maxine is at her desk preparing paperwork, filing slides or helping with whatever task is given to her. While many people her age would consider taking it easy, she remains focused on offering her time and talents to Saint Clare's and her community.

Maxine learned at an early age about compassion and commitment to service. Her father, a country doctor in western Kansas, would go on house calls at all hours of the day and night. This early exposure to medical care led Maxine into the nursing profession.

After World War II, Maxine traveled the world with her husband, who was an officer in the Navy. They lived in the Philippines, Guam and London. Life eventually led her to put down new roots in northern New Jersey, and she found a home in the halls of Saint Clare's Hospital.

After 30 years of service, one cannot begin to calculate the time and effort Maxine has put into bettering this institution. Her work has certainly been more than material. She is indicative of the kind of unshakable commitment her generation possesses.

There is a spiritual strength in this kind of dedicated service, too. At its core, volunteering has the values Catholics aspire to — compassion, sacrifice, selflessness and service. These are the hallmarks of the volunteer staff of Saint Clare's Hospital. The volunteers quietly go about their service and we receive this spiritual gift each and every day.

We are often defined by what we do in life. Our jobs can become a part of who we are. When one volunteers, though, selflessness transforms everyday life into something more. As Winston Churchill put it, “We make a living by what we do, but we make a life by what we give.” Maxine represents the principle of giving of oneself to make a life that is compassionate and selfless.

DAVID WILMES
Saint Clare’s Health System
Denville, New Jersey

Questions for Reflection

What would I like people to say about me after I retire?

What can I do about that, starting now?

“While many people her age would consider taking it easy, she remains focused on offering her time and talents to Saint Clare’s and her community.”

EVERY DAY IS AN OPPORTUNITY

Suggested Sacred Text

Moses Lacks Influence — Exodus 4:1-5

Sacred Story

Some might have considered it to be just another day. But Becky, a dedicated housekeeper, knew that every day was unique and an opportunity for her to make a difference in someone's life. Through her experiences at work, she had learned that healing the whole person includes contributions from every member of the team, regardless of title or background. Her faith in God reinforced her belief that she, too, was an important part of the team.

She smiled as she walked into the room, but the little lady sitting in the chair seemed preoccupied with her own thoughts. As she cleaned, Becky engaged the woman in conversation, and she seemed eager to share her story. Apparently she had fallen at home, and with her injury and weakness she was struggling to return to her former ambulatory state. No matter how hard she worked with the therapist, she just didn't feel balanced and safe when she was up.

As Becky put the finishing touches on the room, she asked if there was anything else she could do for the patient, such as find her something to read or turn on her TV. The woman thanked Becky and said she would really like to read, but that in her fall she had bent her glasses and she was not able to focus her eyes because of the misalignment of the lenses. Becky voiced her sympathy and left to clean the next room.

But, she kept thinking about the woman who wanted to read. Was there anything she could do to help? Becky herself struggled without her glasses, and her heart went out to this dear woman.

Becky found her supervisor and explained the situation. That discussion started a groundswell of support, and it wasn't long before the team had arranged for the local ophthalmologist to come in and adjust the patient's glasses. The woman was grateful that she could now read, and her therapist was thankful to discover that the patient's balance problem was primarily due to her bent glasses.

In the Old Testament, Moses was not sure how he would be able to lead the children of Israel. God asked him, "What is in your hand?" Through the willingness of Moses and the presence of God, a common shepherd's rod became a powerful tool. Becky's willingness to listen to a woman's story and share it with the team, along with her compassion, made a difference in a life that will never forget the caring she found at St. Elizabeth Health Services.

JERRY NICKELL
St. Elizabeth Health Services
Baker City, Oregon

Questions for Reflection

When have I acted on a compelling thought or impulse — a sense of being called — to help someone in need?

"What is in my hand today" that can be used to help someone, or simply brighten their day?

“No matter how hard she worked with the therapist, she just didn't feel balanced and safe when she was up.”

THE WIDOW'S OFFERING

Suggested Sacred Text

The Widow's Offering — Luke 21:1

Sacred Story

One Saturday, while Vicki was answering phones and greeting visitors, a tall man entered the hospital lobby. He approached the desk and patiently waited while Vicki finished a phone call. He handed her a thank-you card with a carefully handwritten note and a money order for \$50 enclosed.

He said that he had been a patient at our medical center and had received absolutely wonderful treatment. He said he was impressed by how nice and helpful everyone was during his stay. He also told her that he had not been in this country long, and although he had meager wages he wanted to show how much he appreciated everything the l North staff had done for him. By this time, everyone within hearing was in tears.

“Although he had meager wages he wanted to show how much he appreciated everything the l North staff had done for him. By this time, everyone within hearing was in tears.”

The hospital president walked through the lobby shortly afterward and Vicki related the story of the grateful patient and his gift. “This \$50 is worth far more than \$5,000, because he gave from his heart all that he could to help our mission at St. Joseph Medical Center,” our president said.

With obvious admiration, Vicki recalls how moved she was by the man’s generosity. “When the gift comes from deep in the heart, it is worth more than its weight in gold,” she said. “I hugged him and told him, ‘God bless you.’” Like the widow in the temple, this man gave generously and in thanksgiving to a cause he believed in.

In reality, not only was our friend blessed by the care he received — we, too, were blessed by his generous heart and kindly spirit. We have been divinely inspired to carry on the retelling of this story. This circle of giving and receiving reminds us of the concentric circles radiating from a single drop in the ocean. Stemming from the compassion of our staff to a single man, then flowing through to an even greater community, this example of extraordinary gratitude and sacrificial giving has been a blessing to us all.

VICKI SZCZEPKOWSKI AND SUSAN KAPPENSTEIN

St. Joseph Medical Center

Reading, Pennsylvania

Questions for Reflection

In what ways do I give of my time, talent and treasure?

How have I benefited from the time, talent and treasure of others?

BRENDA'S BLESSING

Suggested Sacred Text

Matthew 6:28-34

Sacred Story

I had been very sick and had an enormous amount of abdominal pain. My doctor suspected I had diverticulitis. In November 2008, my husband lost his job, along with our insurance coverage. My doctor knew this and began treating me with free samples of medication.

During December and January, I continued to deal with severe abdominal pain, which began to extend to my left side and down to my knee. As my doctor continued to treat me, he suspected something else was going on. In February, I had another attack, and the doctor advised my husband to take me immediately to Memorial Hospital. I was very worried as we had no insurance and I was sure there would be problems being admitted. I was admitted and it was discovered that my condition was more serious than we had thought. Briefly, I ended up having surgery and spent 17 days in the hospital. My surgery and recovery were successful.

During this time, my physician knew my concern about not having insurance. He told me that he was not going to charge for his services. This did relieve my anxiety somewhat.

While I was in the hospital, I was assigned a social worker and she talked with my husband and me about filling out some documents to receive partial assistance with my bill. We filled out the papers and I prayed that our application would be approved.

“I wondered how we
would get money to pay
the bill, but I knew the
Lord would provide.”

After I returned home, I received a large bill from the hospital. I thought I would faint. I wondered how we would get money to pay the bill, but I knew the Lord would provide. A week later, I received a letter from the hospital stating that the bill was reduced significantly. I called the hospital to thank them and make arrangements to pay the balance. When I called, I spoke to a gentleman who checked my account and said, “Mrs. Carson, our records show that your current balance is zero.” I thanked him and hung up the phone.

My husband had heard the entire conversation. We both broke out in tears and thanked God for this great blessing. I then called the hospital’s volunteer department to make myself available. Now, I work Mondays and Fridays at the patient admissions entrance. I look forward to the days when I serve. I have been blessed and just want to give something back by serving others.

BRENDA CARSON
Memorial Health System
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Question for Reflection

How might I become more trusting and reliant upon God in my life?

WORDS THAT LAST A LIFETIME

Suggested Sacred Text

For God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to bring to light the knowledge of the glory of God on the face of (Jesus) Christ. — 2 Corinthians 4:6

Sacred Story

As a chaplain with Franciscan Hospice and Palliative Care, I have the wonderful privilege of meeting people in the end season of their lives. Sometimes in these sacred meetings, I am blessed to hear of events or simple words that changed the direction and attitude of a person's life. Such was the case with Thelma.

Thelma is a vivacious, nearly 90-year-old woman who has dealt with tragedy in her life. Yet, her immediate response when asked, "How are you?" is almost always, "Oh, I am *beautiful!* I am so blessed: God is *so good* to me!" Not long after we met, Thelma shared with me how this phrase came to be a defining statement of her identity.

Thelma grew up in the South in a stable, loving family. Her father owned a successful hardware store, and Thelma admired and loved him. However, when Thelma was just eight years old, her father's store was robbed and he was shot and killed. Her grief, loneliness, fear and insecurity were intensified by teasing from classmates who found her large lips an easy target of ridicule.

Thelma's self-consciousness about her appearance increased to the point that she confided in her music teacher at school. Kindly, he asked, "Do you know how violin strings are made?" Thelma shook her head. "They are made out of cat gut [sheep intestines]. The string makers take something that seems ugly and wind it together to make a taut violin string that will produce beautiful music. Thelma, your life might seem a little like cat gut right now, but God is winding it together to produce something beautiful. You are beautiful, Thelma, and that beauty will only continue to grow. I see it in you, and don't let anything or anyone ever take that beauty away from you."

Thelma went on to complete college and graduate school with full scholarships. She became principal of a school for handicapped children and was president of her church board for many years. Now, nearly 80 years later, when you ask Thelma “How are you?” she replies, “Oh, I am *beautiful!* I am so blessed; God is so good to me!”

DAN J. MACDONALD
Franciscan Hospice and Palliative Care
Gig Harbor, Washington

Questions for Reflection

What is God winding within me to make beautiful music?

How can I help others to let their hidden beauty shine?

“The string makers take something that seems ugly and wind it together to make a taut violin string that will produce beautiful music.”

WHEN THE VINTAGE LINEN IS ON THE TABLE, IT'S TEA TIME

Sacred Story

Stories are a way of connecting us to our history. At Catholic Health Initiatives, when we talk about tea we think of Catherine McCauley, founder of the Sisters of Mercy. The story goes that on her death bed, Catherine told the sister in charge to see to it that the sisters were given “a comfortable cup of tea.” It was her way to bring people together and to celebrate the comings and goings of life.

My team and I were new to the Denver office, and because we traveled often, we did not know many people here. After we discovered our mutual love of tea, we decided to invite our colleagues for tea as a way to connect with them as well as with the heritage of Catholic Health Initiatives.

We began with six tea cups, vintage linen, homemade scones, Irish soda bread, jam and clotted cream. Soon, our tea time vocabulary was enriched with names like Mango Ceylon, Cinnamon Plum, Atlantic City Jubilee, Earl Greyer, Earl Grey White Tip and Lady Londonderry. Our separate lives became woven together by the stories — sacred stories of love, family and friends — we shared with one another over tea.

It has been amazing to watch how individuals select a tea cup and saucer: some choose one similar to their grandmother's old china; others choose one that reminds them of childhood; and others choose a cup simply because it's pretty. One coworker was given her favorite cup from our collection as a gift upon her graduation from college, creating a memory for her and for us. Now, coworkers search for tea cups and saucers when they are shopping, on vacation or traveling. Our selection has grown considerably from the original six.

Tea time is now a lovely part of our work. It allows us to share in our work and helps us connect to our mission. More importantly, we are beginning to create our own sacred moments. As one co-worker commented, “I know how busy we all are and I appreciate the time and effort put into bringing us together. Tea time is a great way of fostering friendship and team spirit and exemplifying our core values to one another.”

When you see the vintage linen, please know that it’s tea time and you’re invited to share in this wonderful, warm and humbling experience.

BETH O’BRIEN AND HER OPERATIONS TEAM

Catholic Health Initiatives

Denver, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

What happens during the day that I can make sacred?

How often do I remember to be intentional about the little things that make a big difference in people’s lives?

“Our separate lives became woven together by the stories — sacred stories of love, family and friends — we shared with one another over tea.”

CALM DURING THE STORM

Suggested Sacred Text

I Thessalonians 5:12-18

Sacred Story

Gina Hern-Martinez begins her work at Sts. Mary & Elizabeth Hospital the same way every day — by visiting the hospital chapel. That’s where she goes to ask for God’s blessing and protection for her patients. Gina also prays for guidance, not just for herself, but for coworkers and physicians. “It is how I prepare myself to give the best care I can,” she said. That daily ritual would bring calm to her on an August day that will never be forgotten.

August 4, 2009, began like any other Tuesday. About 8:30 a.m. it started to rain, as it had many other days that summer. But, this rain turned out to be different. In just over an hour, torrential rains dumped nearly six inches of water on the city. Sts. Mary & Elizabeth Hospital stood directly in the path of one of largest floods to hit the region since the historic Great Flood of 1937, which swamped the city — but didn’t close the hospital.

Rushing water quickly began to surround Sts. Mary & Elizabeth Hospital. It wasn’t long before the basement filled with 16 feet of flood water. All of the electrical and mechanical systems stored there were destroyed. For some perspective, the boilers — which weighed more than 10 tons and had been firmly in place for more than 50 years — were knocked off their foundations.

By 11 a.m., the team at Sts. Mary & Elizabeth Hospital made the hardest decision they were ever faced with — full evacuation of 197 patients. It was the first time since the hospital opened 135 years before that it would have to close.

Gina described the day as an amazing experience, with an extraordinary calm throughout the hospital. “It was as if we had been through this before, but for most it was something we had never experienced,” Gina said. “Team members banded together, and rose to the occasion together, as if it was second nature.”

Staff members on every unit were calm while communicating to patients and family members, reassuring them that they were being moved to a safer environment. By 11:30 p.m., the team had safely moved all patients.

Gina believes that her faith in God and the power of prayer got her through the day. “Prayer is a part of my life that I rely on every day,” she said. “The power of prayer is real and I’ve seen it at work, not only in my life, but in the lives of those I give care to.”

ANGIE ROSE

*Jewish Hospital & St. Mary's HealthCare
Louisville, Kentucky*

Question for Reflection

In what situations or experiences has the power of prayer helped me?

“It was the first time since the hospital opened 135 years before that it would have to close.”

SMALL MEASURES

Suggested Sacred Text

Jesus Washes the Feet of the Disciples — John 13:1-20

Sacred Story

Morna was dying of ovarian cancer. She had many needs, but few requests, and she was always pleasant. Her hope was to live long enough to see her youngest son graduate from high school the following month.

One of her requests was to be as alert as she could be, for as long as possible. She was in severe pain, but there seemed to be little medicine we could give Morna without causing a side effect of extreme drowsiness. To provide comfort, we would give her back rubs to help her relax.

One day I walked by and noted a young nurse rubbing Morna's feet. Later that evening, Morna talked about the foot rub and how it had helped her have one of the most comfortable days she'd had in a long time. She described the day as a gift to her and her family.

I asked the young nurse what had possessed her to rub Morna's feet. She explained, "I was rubbing the feet of Jesus."

DARLYN WEBER, RN

*St. Francis Healthcare Campus
Breckenridge, Minnesota*

Questions for Reflection

Why do I perform my best?

How can I be a servant leader in an environment of sophisticated technology?

Why is the virtue of humility a characteristic of leadership?

“One day I
walked by and
noted a young
nurse rubbing
Morna’s feet.”

SORROWFUL JOY

Suggested Sacred Text

It is not for you to know times or season which [God] has fixed by His own authority. — Acts 1:7

Sacred Story

The cancer was winning, and Oscar was hurting most of the time. But, he would still crack a joke or tease me so that we could both smile.

As we visited in his room, he shared his knowledge of the Lord, and it was a joy for me to learn. Within two months of our first meeting in basic care, he transferred to the acute care side of our facility. There, we visited daily, but often just for five minutes or so. The day came when Oscar was transferred out of our facility to a long-term care facility. I missed him.

One night while I was at home, the Spirit whispered in my ear to go and see Oscar. I finished supper with my family and headed to the long-term care facility where Oscar was.

He was sitting up, but his eyes were closed. I offered his daughter a break while I stayed with him. Oscar piped up, “It’s about time you came!” We chuckled and his daughter felt comfortable enough to leave the room for a while.

We talked about heaven and all the Bible tells us about what heaven looks like. I told him I was jealous, as he was going to see Jesus before me. He teased me that being jealous wasn’t “becoming to a lady.”

Soon he asked, “Why can’t I just go?” I told him God’s timing is always perfect and it wouldn’t be long before he would see God face to face. I told him to relax and I would sing to him. After a while, I thought he’d fallen asleep and I stopped singing. He surprised me by saying, in a booming voice, “Just beautiful — keep singing.” So, sing I did!

When his daughter came back and it was time for me to say goodbye, I kissed his forehead and said I’d see him later in heaven.

The next morning, the team told me Oscar had passed away at about 1 a.m. I thanked God for His mercy and for the life of Oscar that He had allowed me to share in.

Oscar's daughter called me later and asked if I would sing at Oscar's funeral. I had never sung a solo at a funeral before, but I found myself agreeing. It was a sorrowful joy to sing "I Need Thee Every Hour" as we sent Oscar home.

JAN BAKKE
*Carrington Health Center
Carrington, North Dakota*

Questions for Reflection

How does person-centered care call me to extend care beyond the identified patient to include the family and other loved ones who also care for the patient?

How has caring called me to move beyond my comfort level?

“I told him I was jealous, as he was going to see Jesus before me. He teased me that being jealous wasn't ‘becoming to a lady.’”

WHEN TRAVEL IS COST PROHIBITIVE

Suggested Sacred Text

I Corinthians 12:7-11

Sacred Story

Recently, Good Samaritan Hospital admitted a man who was unresponsive and in critical condition. Our nursing and care management staff made contact with his family in Tennessee. Although calls to the family were frequent, the nurses felt they were unable to completely communicate the gravity of the patient's condition. The nurses also learned that financial barriers prevented the family from traveling to central Nebraska.

Fortunately, the Telehealth Services Department at Good Samaritan has the ability to connect with any entity that has videoconferencing equipment. What a blessing it is to have this equipment for compassionate calls. Our program manager found the closest location to our patient's family in Tennessee. A test call proved successful.

Plans for the call were developed with the complete care team at Good Samaritan. Our goal was to fully convey to the family the gravity of the situation. The adage "a picture is worth a thousand words" proved itself in this situation; the visual image of our patient, transmitted to his family, helped immensely.

As our patient's family sat around a TV in Tennessee, our hospital staff reviewed his condition. They moved the camera around the ICU room, showing the family the multitude of equipment in use and explaining everything. As you can imagine, the family was distressed to see the patient in such critical condition. But, they were able to ask questions and to have those questions answered.

One sensed the Holy Spirit at work when everything fell into place for this telehealth call. This collaborative effort exemplifies the compassionate services offered to patients, sometimes through unconventional methods. But, most importantly, the family from Tennessee was able to say goodbye and have closure at the death of their loved one.

KATHY GOSCH, RN
*Good Samaritan Hospital
Kearney, Nebraska*

“One sensed the Holy Spirit at work when everything fell into place for this telehealth call.”

Question for Reflection

How can I, together with my work colleagues, be creative in expressing compassion to patients, families and coworkers?

INTO THY HANDS

Suggested Sacred Text

They will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover. — Mark 16:18

Sacred Story

I was sorry when I found I was not scheduled to work on the day of the annual Blessing of Hands. To me, it is one of the most remarkable days in any work year. After a particularly disappointing loss at work involving a coworker, I had wanted to talk with Sister Frances Renn, a chaplain at Saint Clare's, about loss and the healing that sometimes occurs by the use of our hands in ordinary tasks. But, I would find out again that miracles are not preplanned, nor predestined. They routinely occur when we least expect them.

Months later, I stepped onto the elevator ready to go home, exhausted from the demands of my shift. The elevator stopped at another floor — the addictions unit — and Sister Frances stepped on board. On the way to the lobby, I shared with her how disappointed I was to have missed the hand blessing. Sister Frances said, “Why don't we just bless your hands right here. Would you like for me to pray with you?” I nodded and agreed to her caring suggestion. This special moment was a vivid reminder of the good work we do, no matter how disappointed we may sometimes be at work.

Before Sister Frances finished her blessing, the elevator doors opened. The group in the lobby may have been surprised to see a man and a servant of God, holding hands under the bright lights of the elevator.

Sister Frances blessed my hands for the work that I do, and brought me a resounding reconstitution of my own personal heartache. By blessing my hands without restraint, Sister Frances renewed a sense of purpose in me.

HAMPTON BUMGARNER

Saint Clare's Health System

Boonton, New Jersey

“Sister Frances blessed my hands for the work that I do, and brought me a resounding reconstitution of my own personal heartache.”

Questions for Reflection

When have I received an unexpected blessing from someone?

What unexpected blessing can I give someone today?

THE BUSY FLU SEASON

Suggested Sacred Text

Luke 24:13-16

Sacred Story

In my new role as employee health nurse, this flu season has been particularly challenging. This is the first year that flu vaccination has been required for hospital associates, and the demand on our small department has been great.

One day, I was trying to prepare for a flu vaccine clinic that started at 1 p.m. It was already 12:10 p.m. and I had not had breakfast or lunch, the phone was ringing off the hook and my frustrations were rising. Suddenly, I looked up and two people were there, requesting their flu shots early. I am embarrassed to say that my reaction was less than enthusiastic. I said that our clinic started at 1 p.m., and could they not wait until then? I could tell by their faces that this was not a favorable option. In the most unpleasant voice I could muster, I said, “Fine. Let’s just get this done!”

“I said that our clinic started at 1 p.m., and could they not wait until then? I could tell by their faces that this was not a favorable option.”

The first associate's vaccination was completed quickly. When I got ready for the second, he expressed a sincere apology for causing me trouble. His voice was soft and hesitant, and I saw the fear on his face. At that moment, I finally looked at him as a person, not just as someone who was placing one more demand on me. We began to talk, to explore his fear and his questions regarding the flu vaccine.

We worked on having him relax his arm muscles so the injection would be less painful. After his injection, he was surprised by how painless the process can be. He exclaimed, "The Holy Spirit sent me to you today!" With tears and a completely humbled soul, I said to him, "No, you were brought to me today!"

I truly believe this wonderful soul was brought to me to remind me of the person I am and that all people deserve our kindness, compassion and respect.

ROBIN GEORGE
Memorial Health Care System
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Questions for Reflection

With a hectic schedule and multitude of tasks, how can I assure that I am truly present to my patients and colleagues?

How am I the face of God to others?

NOT A STRANGER, BUT CHRIST!

Suggested Sacred Text

The Last Judgment — Matthew 25:31-46

The Parable of the Good Samaritan — Luke 10:29-37

Sacred Story

It was a relief to return to Denver on time, though getting to the office was delayed by an unusually long wait for the airport parking shuttle. As a result, I had to call the office to postpone some meetings by 30 minutes.

I noticed an agitated young woman walking along the island, stopping briefly at each cluster of passengers. When she came to me, I was surprised when she sheepishly asked if I could help her by an airline ticket to Prague. Her mother was in a coma after having a heart attack. I felt an odd empathy for her, and said yes.

Hana had found a ticket online, but needed me to buy it with my credit card. It was hard to find a wireless connection in the terminal, so we settled at a kiosk. We found the Web site and filled out the online forms. But, unfortunately, I was not able to purchase a ticket for a third party without a seven-day wait. We tried again, hoping to use her debit card, but the online format was designed only for U.S. or Canadian citizens. By this time, I had to call the office again to cancel my appointments.

I saw a friend from Continental Airlines and asked for her help. She sorted through connections and fares until she found a one-way ticket to Prague, leaving the next morning. It was significantly more expensive than the online alternative, but I felt that I had made a commitment to Hana, to get her home. Hana was ecstatic to the point of tears. She thanked me profusely, gave me a small portion of the ticket's cost, and promised to send the rest when she got home.

I was ambivalent about what I had done. I was suspicious: Was the money counterfeit? Would she show up to take the flight, or somehow pawn the ticket? What if she was a terrorist and the authorities traced the ticket to me? Pretty bizarre thoughts!

But, I also thought about the many people who helped me when I was a college student cycling in Europe. I thought of the many people Hana had asked for help who had said no. And, I thought of the Good Samaritan, who helped a foreigner without counting the cost. I soon forgot about the money and simply hoped I wasn't foolishly naïve.

A couple of days later, Hana emailed me. Her mother was better and expecting to recover. With some perseverance with online banking, Hana was able to mail me the rest of the money for the ticket.

I know that Hana was thankful, and I am sure she told her mother, family and neighbors that she found a Good Samaritan in the airport that day. I understand that, and recall those who have been Christ for me in their kindness and generosity. But, there is another aspect to the story. She was Christ to me in her need, and I was grateful that I was able to help her. I was reminded of the words of Dorothy Day: "The Lord is disguised under every form of humanity that treads the earth." When we see others as Christ, we approach them not for what they can give us, but what we might give them. How eager we would be to bear another's burden if we met not a stranger, but Christ!

ANONYMOUS

Questions for Reflection

Why am I so reluctant to enter into the chaos of another? What barriers do I put up to protect myself from the people around me?

How do I judge those I see in need?

If I saw Christ in the need of others, how would it change how I approach my work?

AN AFFIRMATION OF GOD'S WORK

Sacred Story

Early one Saturday morning, a Hispanic family came to our Emergency Department. The father had to undergo an emergency heart catheterization. The only one in the family who spoke fluent English was an 18-year-old daughter. Coincidentally, the devotion I had prepared for Sunday's chapel services focused on living in a foreign country and undergoing medical treatment.

After the daughter expressed her family's deep appreciation for the solace provided during their emergency situation, I invited her to share her story during the next day's chapel service as a part of the devotional. Even though she had been up all night, she seemed excited and agreed.

God blessed the service. In preparing my devotion, I had used Ephesians 3:20–21. When the young woman arrived, she had written on a piece of paper, as a gift for me, her favorite verse: Ephesians 3:17–20.

“So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.” Ephesians 3:17–21

That was not a coincidence, according to my theological thinking, but another point of affirmation of God's work and goodness in our midst.

ED SHEI

*Saint Joseph Hospital
Lexington, Kentucky*

Questions for Reflection

Have I ever been surprised by God?

What was that like, and how did it feel?

“She had written
on a piece of
paper, as a gift
for me, her
favorite verse.”

FINDING THE BALANCE

Sacred Story

How can you be Christian to someone who is uncooperative and downright mean? It wasn't Mary's wish to enter our long-term care facility, but she had reached a stage in her life when she could no longer keep herself safe. She had little family; a niece three states away was her power of attorney. There were few people she trusted, and she demanded much from those she did. Mary had little in terms of assets and would easily qualify for medical assistance once she listed her home for sale. But, her home was her only asset. She was reluctant to give it up, and hoped that she could return there someday.

As financial leader of our MBO, I became frustrated because Mary could not afford her care. Medical assistance would not pay unless she attempted to sell her home, which she refused to do. At \$3,000 per month, she began accumulating bills at a very fast rate. However, she soon became ill and entered the hospital.

I was asked to distribute communion to the Catholic patients in the hospital, and Mary was on my list. As I prayed with her and gave her Eucharist, I realized there was a spiritual side to Mary. She was much more than a crabby old lady; she was a child of Christ. That night, Mary went "home," to her God.

Working in finance can be a struggle when trying to balance job duties — to meet margins and to be compassionate. My experience with Mary was a message and a gift from God. I encourage all financial leaders and staff within Catholic Health Initiatives to find a way to keep the spirituality of their clients foremost in their jobs.

NANCY WHITNEY
*St. Francis Healthcare Campus
Breckenridge, Minnesota*

Questions for Reflection

How do I look beyond the disease or limitations of our patients and residents to find God's presence in them?

How am I God's presence to our patients and residents?

“Her home was her only asset. She was reluctant to give it up, and hoped that she could return there someday.”

A SACRIFICIAL HEART

Sacred Story

Our community was recently the site of an F3 tornado. The south end of town was hit with vicious winds and many people lost their homes, members of our staff among them. St. Joseph's Hospital and Health Center organized opportunities for employees to help employees by donating to a fund for those who had been victims of the storm.

We held a variety of fundraising events and accepted free-will donations. One woman's donation impressed me deeply and reminded me of the story Jesus tells in the Bible of "The Widow's Offering" (Mark 12:41-44 and Luke 21:1-4).

"I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." Luke 21:3-4

Like the widow in the Bible story, this particular employee lives on a fixed income. One day, she stopped me in the hall to make a donation to the tornado victims' fund. Aware of her financial situation, I thought how kind it was of her to give any of her earnings. When I unfolded the bill she handed me and saw that it was \$100, I was in awe. Her donation made it apparent to me how easy it is to give of our largesse, and how much more meaningful it is to dig deep and give sacrificially. I reflected on myself as a giver, and promised that in the future I would not be a "small thinker" in giving. Like her, I want to give cheerfully, and from the heart.

By giving not of her excess, but of her living funds, this lady of quiet servitude embodied the spirit of generosity that is so much a part of Catholic Health Initiatives. It was a beautiful demonstration of the heart of those who work in this hospital and who serve one another as well as our community.

DENNIS CANNON

*St. Joseph's Hospital and Health Center
Dickinson, North Dakota*

“When I unfolded the bill she handed me and saw that it was \$100, I was in awe.”

Questions for Reflection

At times, am I more of a “small thinker” in giving? If so, why? If not, why not?

What do I hear in this story about relationships at work?

IN THE COMPANY OF ANGELS

Suggested Sacred Text

May the Angels Lead You Into Paradise

Funeral Song for the Rite of Committal from the Order of Christian Funerals

May the angels lead you into Paradise.

May the martyrs come to greet you on the way.

*May they lead you home to the holy city,
to the new and eternal Jerusalem.*

May the choirs of angels come to welcome you.

*May they take you to the arms of Abraham,
where Lazarus is poor no longer,
and there may you find rest, rest eternal.*

Sacred Story

On a quiet night in the Intensive Care Unit where I worked as a young nurse, I met a patient named Kathryn. She was quite elderly, with white wavy hair and a soft face that had become wrinkled with memories and smiles during her long life. That night, however, Kathryn was not smiling. Her failing health had taken a quick turn for the worse.

She had coded several times in the Emergency Department, but God allowed the nurses and doctors to restore her life each time with a precordial thump. When Kathryn's heart went into a lethal arrhythmia called ventricular fibrillation, the nurse or doctor would make a fist and firmly strike her chest over her heart to convert the rhythm to a normal one. Often this procedure does not work, but for Kathryn, it worked every time.

Tonight she lay quietly in the ICU bed amid the noise of the monitors, IV pumps and other machines that kept her alive. She would occasionally open her eyes and seemingly attempting to take it all in, but never spoke a word. I checked on her frequently and spoke to her softly, but she simply watched me in silence and regarded her surroundings carefully.

The stillness of the night was suddenly broken by the loud triple beat of the cardiac monitors. Kathryn was coding. My coworkers and I rushed into her room and delivered the sharp precordial thump and she immediately returned to a painful consciousness. After that, she continued to alternate between life and death; as her heart would begin to fibrillate, we would rush in and strike her chest. This occurred time and time again.

The final time we converted her heart to a normal rhythm, she opened her eyes and looked deep into mine. In a weak voice she asked, “Are you an angel?” I was awestruck by the clarity of her words. “Did you see angels?” I asked. She smiled briefly and nodded peacefully. With her hand over her heart, she softly said, “No more.” I quickly called her physician to get a “no code” order, and she died serenely moments later.

This is Kathryn’s story. We wore white uniforms back then and through her faith, somewhere between life and death, she had seen heavenly hosts of angels and communicated her salvation to me. She welcomed her earthly death, embracing it like a long lost friend, only to receive eternal life and meet her Savior who received her into heaven’s gates. And the angels she had seen? I am certain they were nearby, joyfully singing, “Glory to God on high!”

KRIS HUGHBANKS, RN

Good Samaritan Hospital

Kearney, Nebraska

“She opened her eyes and looked deep into mine. In a weak voice she asked, ‘Are you an angel?’”

Question for Reflection

Is there anyone on my unit or in my work group who I can be an “angel” for today?

THE POWER OF A KIND WORD

Suggested Sacred Text

Philippians 4:4-7

Sacred Story

It was a typical morning in the Heart Institute outpatient catheterization lab: a lot of activity as nurses kept up with the day's schedule while offering the type of care they are known for.

Then, there's me. I'm a volunteer, a retired marketing manager. I was trying to stay out of the way, yet be useful. My primary function is to assist the nurses however possible and assure that patients and their families are comfortable. My trademark is a smile and words of encouragement for the people I meet. You see, I've been in their situation, several times.

This particular morning, there was a lady patient who was very nervous and caustic in her attitude. I sensed she would be my "project" for the day. She had several family members with her, and they all spoke about what a "handful" their mother was. One of her daughters commented, "Nothing in this world is going to make Mama relax today." They were trying to encourage her to turn back to her faith, as she had not made God welcome in her life.

I spoke with the patient several times, and prayed with her for peace concerning the upcoming procedure. At first, she was somewhat unresponsive, but as the morning progressed, I sensed she was becoming more at ease and a little nicer to the nurses. I took the opportunity to share with her how much God loved her. I reminded her that God had a plan for her life and that her daughters loved her more than she could imagine. When she returned from her procedure, I stopped by again and offered a prayer of thanksgiving for the good news. I must have said something right because when I left, she was smiling.

Later that day, I took a break in the waiting area. The patient's daughters came over to talk with me. One of them said, "We have something to tell you. When we went to see Mom a few minutes ago, she seemed different somehow. She said, 'You girls know that peace you've been telling me about? Well, when that man was in here talking and praying with me, I prayed too, and IT CAME TO ME! Now I know what you're talking about!'"

It's a blessing to be in a faith-based hospital, where we have the freedom to meet needs that, at times, are more than physical. Someone may need you today. Your blessing is waiting, maybe just around the next corner. Oh, and the girls were right, nothing in *this* world made the change in their mother that day. It took the touch of the Great Physician. He wants to use each one of us to reach out to others.

TIM COOPER
Memorial Health Care System
Chattanooga, Tennessee

Question for Reflection

Today, will I look for opportunities to spread God's peace and tranquility to others?

“There was a lady patient who was very nervous and caustic in her attitude. I sensed she would be my ‘project’ for the day.”

PACING PRAYERS

Sacred Story

Each day before work, I pray. While walking, I say the Lord's Prayer and others to the rhythm of my feet — my "pacing prayers." When I get into the elevator, I lightly tap my feet to a prayer.

One day, I found myself working in the emergency transition area. I came across an 80-year-old female patient. She was situated in one of those inconvenient rooms that have not yet received an update. Nevertheless, she made no particular complaints.

She, like many of her age, was a little slow in her responses but made her needs known. As is often the case with spiritual people, some of her possessions indicated her beliefs. I noticed some holy cards and a prayer book — clues that she was a Catholic, as am I.

At bedtime, I alluded to her Catholicity and asked if she prayed the rosary, which many traditional elders do as a cherished form of worship and meditation. She responded, with surprise, "Do you do that here?" I had a rosary out in my car and went to retrieve it. I had some holy water in a bottle, too, so I brought that along.

Back at the patient's bedside, I asked if she wanted to be blessed with holy water by herself or me. She preferred me, so I traced the sign of the cross over her. Then I presented her with my rosary.

Before leaving, I had the satisfaction of seeing her asleep with the rosary clutched in her hands and in a state of peace. In retrospect, my pacing prayers of that morning — to offer special grace to a receptive patient — had been answered.

MARK MOORE, RN
Saint Joseph Medical Center
Tacoma, Washington

Questions for Reflection

How do I invite my God into the work I do?

Which of my beliefs might someone discern if they saw my possessions?

“As is often the case with spiritual people, some of her possessions indicated her beliefs.”

PRESENT WITH EACH OTHER, EVEN OVER EMAIL

Suggested Sacred Text

I Thessalonians 1:2-5

Sacred Story

The headlines constantly remind us that the economic conditions we face have not been seen since the Great Depression. But, what does that mean for each of us in our daily walk? The following is an example of how we can care even if we are miles away.

One day, a group of us received an email with the subject line “Sad News.” It said that Mercy Hospital in Devils Lake, North Dakota, had laid off a number of staff members that week as part of their response to the economic situation. In addition, a cook at the hospital — the mother of one of our team members — had just passed away after a cardiac arrest. The entire hospital was in shock.

Email was quiet for a few minutes after that. It felt as if concrete blocks had landed on our chests.

The next day, we received the following email, written by one of our colleagues:

*“May a loving God shower His tender mercies upon this woman and her family,
and her extended family in Devil’s Lake.*

May a caring God bless those who mourn, and show them comfort.

May a knowing God help us all to replace our human fear with heavenly faith.

*May a compassionate God help us reach out to Him in prayer so that
we may fully grieve a great loss and move, in time, to healing.*

*May our Heavenly Father help us carry this heavy load of grief, and when we are too weak,
carry us on the wings of His love and fill our souls with the light of Christ.*

It is in the name our Lord, Jesus Christ, that we pray.

Amen.”

To me, this is what being part of Catholic Health Initiatives and being a human is all about. We cannot prevent tragedy. But, we can be present with God and each other, even if only over email.

EVON HOLLADAY

Catholic Health Initiatives

Denver, Colorado

Question for Reflection

What situations or circumstances in my work or personal life could benefit from taking time out for a brief moment of prayer?

“Email was quiet for a few minutes after that. It felt as if concrete blocks had landed on our chests.”

CAMIE'S WISH

Suggested Sacred Text

Do not be afraid, just have faith. — Mark 5:36

Sacred Story

Camie is a patient who visits the hospital frequently due to chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder. On one early summer visit, we discussed things that help her feel better. She mentioned that she would like to take a vacation — she had never been on one. When I asked if she had a place in mind, she did not. Camie had never been farther than 50 miles from home. I thought it would be nice to give her a vacation — but how?

Camie was re-admitted within a month. I stopped by to ask how she was. She smiled and said, “I still haven’t been on a vacation.” As I left the room I saw her physician at the nurses’ station. I asked him about the possibility of Camie taking a vacation. His eyes lit up. He thought it was a great idea.

I called Camie to ask if she would like to take a vacation to Lexington, Kentucky, on Labor Day weekend. For a minute, she was speechless. Then she said, “Yes.”

Word spread and donations were given to Camie’s vacation fund. Hospital staff members arranged a discounted hotel rate and activities for Camie and her daughter to enjoy. We all knew Camie’s situation, and everyone was excited to help make her wish come true.

Labor Day weekend arrived. Camie and her daughter were driven to Lexington, where they loved their room at the Lexington Hilton Suites. With oxygen in tow and Camie transported by wheelchair, nothing stopped them from enjoying themselves. They watched ducks at the lake, shopped and saw movies. When it was over, their smiles of appreciation meant a lot.

Providing a vacation for this very dear lady was a good feeling. But, more important to me was seeing the face of God in my coworkers — an amazing group of people who gave of themselves. Their hearts were open to an act of kindness that they knew would bless someone they had grown fond of, but could only do so much for through medical care.

There were two blessings in this act of kindness: A lovely woman was granted her wish, and a group of employees showed her how much they care. We don't have to look far to see the face of God — we just have to look at the person standing next to us.

FLORA WASHBURN

Saint Joseph — Berea

Berea, Kentucky

Questions for Reflection

When was the last time I had a “real” vacation?

How did that vacation feel?

Do I carry that vacation experience with me? Why, or why not?

“More important to me was seeing the face of God in my coworkers — an amazing group of people who gave of themselves.”

OPENING THE DOOR

Suggested Sacred Text

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" "Here I am," I said; "send me!" — Isaiah 6:8

You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. — Acts 1:8

For the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say. — Luke 12:12

Sacred Story

On a beautiful fall Saturday, I was called to the Emergency Department to be with a family whose loved one had been in a serious farm accident. At St. Gabriel's Hospital, I found Sally and her two young children. Sally's mother had called her to say that her father, Mr. Olson, was badly injured and that Sally should go directly to the hospital. I stayed with Sally and her children as she waited for her mother and sister to arrive and for more information about her father.

When her mother and sister arrived, they shared the sad news that Mr. Olson had died as a result of his injuries. He had been driving a tractor through a ditch when the tractor overturned, and he was pinned underneath. His body had been taken directly to a local funeral home, not to the hospital. The women and children cried together.

The family wanted to see Mr. Olson, and the funeral director said he would be ready. One of the grandchildren, six-year-old Katie, tearfully refused to go. I volunteered to stay in Sally's van with Katie while the rest of the family went into the funeral home.

Katie sat in her car seat, looking anxiously at the door of the funeral home, waiting for her mom and sister to return. I tried to engage her in conversation, with little success. I prayed, asking God to help me help this little girl. I asked if she could tell me what her grandpa looked like. She said, “He looks all bloody.” I could only imagine what was in her mind after she listened to details about how her grandpa died. I thanked God for opening a door that allowed me to offer explanations and reassurance. After we talked, she seemed less worried and asked to be with her mom in the funeral home.

The following week, I attended the wake for Mr. Olson. This time, Katie took my hand. She led me to the casket to view her grandpa, then went off to play with her sister and cousins. I was grateful that God had given me the grace to reach the little girl’s frightened and saddened heart and help her through a time that was hard for the entire family.

BEA BRITZ
Unity Family Healthcare
Little Falls, Minnesota

Questions for Reflection

When have I prayed for God’s help so that I might help someone else?

When have I experienced God opening a door that enabled me to offer comfort, reassurance or other needed support?

“I thanked God for opening a door that allowed me to offer explanations and reassurance.”

THE TRAVELER ON THE ROAD

Suggested Sacred Text

The Good Samaritan — Luke 10:29-37

Sacred Story

As vice president of human resources, on most days I have more interaction with employees than patients. Yet, on a lovely spring morning as I walked near our Emergency Department entrance, I saw a gentleman who looked lost. I asked if he needed help. He said he was looking for the place where they help people who have had heart surgery to recover. After asking a few more questions, I learned that he had been a patient at Good Samaritan Hospital two years before, and had traveled quite a distance to return and say thank you.

Interstate 80 cuts across the nation just a few miles from our hospital. This gentleman had been traveling that road, moving from New Mexico to Illinois on Memorial Day weekend. When he got to Kearney, he said, “My heart had other plans for me — bypass surgery!” He promised himself that if he ever made it back this way, he would not drive by without stopping to say thank you.

“He had been a patient at Good Samaritan Hospital two years before, and had traveled quite a distance to return and say thank you.”

As I visited with the man, I realized that he was clutching a heart-shaped pillow, carefully covered in protective plastic. Each open-heart surgery patient at Good Samaritan receives a heart-shaped pillow as part of the recovery and rehabilitation process. It is designed to protect the sternum and can be held close to the patient's chest to ease discomfort when breathing, coughing or laughing. The pillows are donated by our Volunteer Service League. Working with the league, we were able to reintroduce our former patient to his open-heart surgeon and several of the staff members who had signed his pillow. The man was thrilled to tell everyone how much his autographed heart pillow meant to him, and to share his praise for our staff and hospital.

Here at Good Samaritan Hospital, we talk about striving to “make the story of the Good Samaritan a living reality.” For this traveler on the road, we certainly achieved that mission. I felt honored to play a small role in helping him express his gratitude to our hardworking staff.

ROB CUNNINGHAM
Good Samaritan Hospital
Kearney, Nebraska

Question for Reflection

How do I make time to thank employees who have made a positive difference in the lives of those around them?

LOVE AND HEALING IN EACH STITCH

Suggested Sacred Text

May you be wrapped in prayer

With the healing touch of Jesus

Feel His arms around you

His loving, compassionate presence

Rest in His Spirit

Giving all burdens to Him.

May you be wrapped in prayer

From now to eternity,

In Christ's holy presence

Give praise to God.

The God of comfort, peace and love.

The God of grace, hope and joy.

Susie Foushee

Sacred Story

Blessing patients with a prayer shawl is a joy. The soft, colorful mantle of a shawl gives patients a tangible symbol of God's gentle, healing presence.

We are assisted in this sacred task by the knitters at the local First United Methodist Church. They are volunteers who create prayer shawls for adults and children, with an intention of love and healing in each stitch.

As the creator knits the shawl, he or she prays that the recipient will experience God's love while wearing it or holding it. A card is attached to each prayer shawl. It reads in part, "This prayer shawl is for you to know that someone has been and continues to pray for you. May it encourage you to know that God is with you every step of the way, every day."

"We enjoy choosing particular colors for different patients."

We enjoy choosing particular colors for different patients. One chaplain chose a plum-colored shawl for an elderly male patient. Some weeks later, the patient returned for another hospitalization with the shawl around his shoulders. “I never go anywhere without it,” he said. It was a pleasure to pass by his room and see the shawl brightening his bed.

Another patient’s daughter took her mother’s bright yellow prayer shawl home after her mom died in the hospital. The shawl was a reminder of her mother’s sunny personality and how love had encircled her in the hospital during the last days of her life.

I performed a baby blessing using a tiny blue prayer shawl. I covered the newborn boy with the delicate blanket while his family and I prayed that God would be present with him, protecting and guiding him as he grew. Perhaps his little shawl will occupy a special place in the family, reminding the young one and his parents that he is a precious child of God.

Our prayer shawl ministry, made possible by faithful church volunteers, is a great privilege. We picture their prayers, imbued in every yarn fiber, radiating around the recipients. The shawls are a reminder that patients are not alone. They are connected to a community of faith, knit together by a loving, healing God who knows every stitch in our lives.

STEPHANIE DIAL
Mercy Regional Medical Center
Durango, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

What reminds me of God’s constant presence and comforting love in my life?

What tangible symbol of God’s gentle, healing presence have I given to someone?

What tangible symbol of God’s presence have I received?

CARING FOR BROKEN HEARTS

Suggested Sacred Text

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me. — Matthew 25:35

Sacred Story

Our obstetrics unit was busy on a day close to Christmas 2008 when a young Hispanic mother came into our hospital. She spoke very little English and her husband understood just a little more than she did. They had arrived in the United States a few weeks before. She was 23 weeks and four days pregnant and had little to no amniotic fluid. Her husband thought that her membranes had been ruptured for a week. Unfortunately, the baby died.

The couple was scared and heartbroken. Imagine being in a foreign country for a very short time, losing your precious child, and understanding very little of what is happening to you.

As nurses, we grieved and shed tears with them. The holidays are such a hard time to experience a loss, and this sweet couple had very little money. They hadn't been in the U.S. long enough to get Social Security numbers, and because of that the county was unable to provide assistance with the burial of the infant. We talked among ourselves about how to help.

As manager of our unit, I felt compelled to tell others in our administration about the situation. As soon as I did, phone calls were made. Within minutes, the Saint Joseph - Mount Sterling Foundation had agreed to pay for the burial. My heart felt so good! As I came back to my unit, I was overwhelmed with emotion at how much we can do for others. I thought, "This is definitely why we do what we do!"

The nurses who had the most contact with the couple told them about the assistance of the foundation. There were many tears shed by the couple and the staff alike. No words were needed to convey the couple's gratitude, although they said "thank you" over and over again.

As they were discharged, they hugged everyone they saw in the hallway. What a wonderful Christmas gift to them. What a great reminder to us of the effect that the way in which we do our work can have on others.

JAN CORNETT, RN
Saint Joseph - Mount Sterling
Mount Sterling, Kentucky

Questions for Reflection

How do I make our organization and community a welcoming and sacred place for people from other countries and cultures?

*Who among my patients, colleagues or family members is in need of some special support or assistance?
How can I help?*

“They hadn’t been in the U.S. long enough to get Social Security numbers, and because of that the county was unable to provide assistance with the burial of the infant.”

BEYOND RELIGIOUS BOUNDARIES

Suggested Sacred Text

Praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds.

Master of the day of judgment.

*You (alone) we worship and You (alone) we ask
for help (for each and everything).*

Guide us to the straight path.

Quran: Sura Ul-Fatah Verses. 2a, 4-6

Sacred Story

I remember the first time I met Ali, a cancer patient at Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center. It was about two years ago and he was alone. I asked him about his family and he said, "I live with my wife while the rest of the family is back in my native country."

He was a devout Muslim of Asian descent. Over time, we had several visits and we prayed together. Out of respect for him and his religion, I used the Muslim word for God, Allah.

On one occasion, Ali asked me if I was Muslim. I told him that I was Christian, and he told me his wife is Christian and from the U.S. He said that this didn't matter because it is the same God and that, believe it or not, he prayed more to Jesus.

Ali was always alone for his radiation treatments. However, one day I entered his room to see a lady sitting beside him. She introduced herself as his wife, Alice. As we talked, I learned that Ali was a very private person, especially in regard to his cancer. In fact, she said that Ali never wanted to tell anybody about his cancer journey, not even his family back home. He thought people would treat him differently and his family would be too worried. He kept the secret from his neighbors, walking to his car without help, even on very bad days. Alice could not tell anybody, either, because that was her promise to Ali.

Ali was very sick and his time was getting closer. Just hours before Ali died, I asked Alice if I could call any family members or friends. She had no names to

give. Alice was in tears. She told me Ali had been given only six months to live — and that was six years ago!

I gave her my phone number should she want to talk. I did get a phone call the next day, asking if I would be willing to do the funeral service for Ali, putting the Christian and Muslim faiths together — something I had never done before. Alice told me that Ali would have wanted that; he had found much comfort in our praying and talking together.

I accepted the challenge to put a combined service together. I made phone calls. I visited an Arabic store, where the owner downloaded appropriate Quranic text for me. An American friend lent me his Quran and a Muslim family from Colorado helped me choose appropriate verses.

I was nervous at the service. I am a Christian and a female, who was leading a memorial service for a Muslim male. Throughout the service, the emphasis was on how two people of different backgrounds, religions and cultures could become one, stay together for 27 years and live a happy married life, each faithful to their own beliefs while respecting the other.

The comments I heard after the service were that the message was very comforting and one that touched the heart. It truly touched mine in a way I'll never forget.

NOSHEEN RAFIQUE

*Saint Elizabeth Regional Medical Center
Lincoln, Nebraska*

“I was nervous at the service. I am a Christian and a female, who was leading a memorial service for a Muslim male.”

Questions for Reflection

In recognizing the diversity among the people I serve and serve with, what do I hold in common with them?

How does identifying what we hold in common inform how I do my work?

THE BLUE ELEPHANT OF APPRECIATION

Sacred Story

Three months ago, I had the opportunity to visit a pediatric patient named Michael. As I entered his room, Michael was sitting up in bed, working with some clay. He was small, with chestnut-colored hair and soft features. As I came closer, I saw a shoe box filled with an assortment of miniature creatures made of clay: a yellow tiger, a pink cow, multi-colored birds. There must have been at least 15 miniature sculptures in the shoe box. Michael's hands were busy sculpting a bright red frog as he welcomed me to his room.

He asked me what my favorite color was. I said blue. He asked what my favorite animal was, and I said an elephant. I watched in amazement as, in seconds, his small, delicate fingers created an elephant from a lump of blue clay. He handed me a blue elephant, barely an inch long, with gold tusks and a pink nose at the end of its trunk. In silence, our eyes connected. He said, "Thank you." "Thank you?" I asked. Michael said, "All of you saved my life. I made this elephant for you in appreciation of what you did for me." I was speechless. His eyes glistened with sincerity and his complete trust blossomed into a smile.

Michael turned toward his parents as they walked over to me. "Our son attempted suicide two days ago. He believes the hospital gave him back his life," they explained. "Michael makes a gift of clay for everyone who enters his room to show his appreciation for life. God did not give up on Michael and neither did those of you at the hospital."

Our paths may never cross again. I may never know the man I hope this child will become. But, I received an extraordinary gift that only Michael could provide — a blue elephant. To me, it represents a young boy recognizing God's gift of life, which is to be shared and appreciated. Michael's words of thanks are forever embedded in my heart as I look at my blue elephant and think of him.

CATHI RUIZ

Penrose-St. Francis Health Services

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

What do I do when I enter a patient's room?

Am I aware that I bring God's presence with me?

Am I ready to receive the gift of presence from the other person?

“Michael’s hands were busy sculpting a bright red frog as he welcomed me to his room.”

CONNECTING WITH THE PEOPLE I SERVE

Suggested Sacred Text

Luke 2:41-47

Sacred Story

My work space is neither an office nor a cubicle, but an area in eastern North Dakota with a radius of 140 miles. It includes the Division Office, Revenue Realization Center, Friendship Inc., and Riverview Place in Fargo as well as sites in several other communities. Actually, my work space is usually someone else's work space. I am there to install or fix a computer, printer, phone or some other electronic equipment.

As an information technology lead, I realized some time ago that my ministry in Catholic Health Initiatives is not the connecting of cords and cables, but the connections made with the people I serve. My ministry is not about listening for beeps and dial tones, but listening for the joys and frustrations behind the words people say to me. People often use me as a sounding board and confidant. I suppose they think of me as neutral or detached from those in their work areas, and they feel they can open up to me. Employees from all levels of Catholic Health Initiatives share their stories with me — often sacred stories — and I regard this as a sacred trust.

An employee once told me about an Advocacy Day she initially thought would be about helping an elderly homeowner with cleaning and minor repairs. She quickly realized that what the lady wanted most was someone to sit and talk with her. And so she did. Another employee talked about being exhausted after filling sand bags at night as part of Fargo Flood Fight 2009, and then coming to work each day.

Why did they do these things? Call it reverence, or the strong faith of the people of this region. Call it integrity and compassion, or “North Dakota nice.” Call it excellence or the Midwestern work ethic. However we talk about them, our core values are simply who we are and how we do things around here. They are integral to our story.

If you have a computer that needs to be installed or fixed, I am here to serve you. If you have your own sacred story to tell, well, then I am here to listen. That is how I try to do things around here. That is how I strive to live out our core values each day. And that, for me, is the difference between doing a job and being part of a ministry.

STEVE SPICKENREUTHER

Villa Nazareth

Fargo, North Dakota

Questions for Reflection

CHI's "Spirit of Innovation and Legacy of Care" is nurtured by telling stories.

How do I share stories that nurture the CHI healing ministry?

How do I live CHI's core values of Reverence, Integrity, Compassion and Excellence each day?

“Employees from all levels of Catholic Health Initiatives share their stories with me — often sacred stories — and I regard this as a sacred trust.”

STANDING TALL ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS

Sacred Story

At a Heritage Day service in 2007, I heard Sister Margaret Meisner talk about Sister Theresa Joseph Babcock, known to our long-tenured employees as “Sister TJ.” Sister Margaret described what Sister TJ was like so that all employees would know why a service award named for her is presented to outstanding employees who embody the spirit of service in their work.

At the same Heritage Day service, Sister Emily Nabholtz mentioned the names of other sisters who had been missioned at St. Vincent through the years. As she read their names, employees nodded their heads, smiling and fondly remembering the days when the sisters were here.

That prompted an idea from one of my staff members, Marcella Wiggins. “We need to go to Nazareth, Kentucky, and film the sisters,” Marcella said. Most of the sisters who had served at St. Vincent were retired and living at the motherhouse of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth near Bardstown, Kentucky. We realized the value of capturing their stories and memories on video to share with future employees, and to reconnect our staff to the humble beginnings and challenging times of St. Vincent’s past.

In spring 2008, we went to Nazareth to meet the sisters and learn how the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth came to start a hospital in Little Rock. I didn’t realize then how much I would learn about myself and my mission at St. Vincent along the way.

Here are some of the comments and insights captured in the video Marcella and I created for our 2009 Heritage Day:

In December of 1812, Father Jean Baptiste Marie David and Sister Catherine Spalding formed the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. Catherine Spalding served as Mother Superior until her death in 1858.

Sister Judy Raley— “The sisters got into health care because there was a need that grew out of the cholera epidemic in the 1830s. Our sisters became nurses overnight and went out and nursed the people and took risks.”

As the community grew, so did the geographic scope of services, with schools, hospitals and orphanages established in Bardstown, Louisville and Memphis. In 1888, the Most Reverend Edward Fitzgerald, bishop of the Little Rock Diocese, invited the sisters to Little Rock to establish a hospital after a yellow fever epidemic, which ravaged the South but spared the city.

Little Rock had few physicians and no hospital service at that time. Mr. and Mrs. Alexander Hager provided the funds to build a hospital. Later, the hospital name was changed from Charity Hospital to St. Vincent Infirmary in honor of St. Vincent de Paul. That was the beginning of the heritage we celebrate today.

Sister Mary Wedding— “We stressed humility, simplicity and charity in the spirit of St. Vincent DePaul. I know that Vincent DePaul is St. Vincent Infirmary, and we want to keep it true to St. Vincent.”

Sister Emily Nabholtz— “Employees need to know the story and keep the story alive. When I was at St. Vincent, I would give the orientation for the new employees and I was always asked to tell how the sisters got into health care, how we first came to Little Rock and started the hospital. Keep the story in your heart, because it will be a source of inspiration and a source of courage for you.”

Sister Emily Nabholtz— “There’s a friendliness here, and a sense of compassion, simplicity, humility and charity that we would say are the charisms of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth that have not been lost. The spiritual dimension of care is just tremendously important.”

The sisters had some special messages for employees:

Sister Mary Wedding— “I know you have to pay the bills, and I know you have to work hard so you can stay within your budget — but, each person is important, each person is precious and each person should be welcomed.”

Sister Margaret Meisner — “Look at being here as a ministry. If you are the healing hands of Jesus and the presence of Jesus, then you have the compassion, gentleness and spirituality that brings us to what we are all about.”

Sister Earline Hobbs — “You are not just a worker — you are a minister continuing the work of Jesus Christ, which happens to be the healing ministry. And that ministry will be done by you or it won’t be done.”

Sister Theresa Knabel — “To each person you meet today, you are St. Vincent to that person. You are Jesus Christ to that person, bringing health care, showing interest, showing respect. And that makes such a huge difference to people, especially if they are suffering and hurting and in need.”

Sister Margaret Vincent Blandford — “There’s a saying that ‘We stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us.’ Climbing atop those shoulders is one thing, striving to gain your balance there is another. But the perspective from that vantage point encourages us to stand tall and trustingly.”

When Marcella and I showed the video to Sister Judy and Sister Emily, they said we captured the true spirit of the Sisters of Charity of Nazareth. I hope that after reading this story, you not only feel the same way, but will keep the story alive through the addition of your own.

MARGARET “PEG” LOYD

St. Vincent Health System

Little Rock, Arkansas

Questions for Reflection

What are some things that give meaning and purpose to my work?

What do I do to remember those things?

“Employees need
to know the
story and keep
the story alive.”

THE BREATH OF LIFE

Sacred Story

Irene had advanced chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and her comfort was the priority in her care. I entered her room to see her sitting up in bed, struggling to breathe. Simply inhaling and exhaling required all her concentration. I couldn't imagine how she slept. She had a washed-out look on her face, and I feared that without oxygen pumping into her nostrils she would have expired right then. I felt exhausted watching her, as though I had run a sprint or stayed under water too long.

I felt helpless. What would bring her some sense of consolation? How could she experience at least a measure of peace in her labor of living? Where would meaning come from in her final days? She was welcoming and friendly, but I hesitated to even engage in conversation with her. Her yawning gasp punctuated every few words. At times, we sat in silence, seeming to speak without words.

Irene's situation was not very inspiring or uplifting. Its harsh reality could not be denied. But often, in the darkest times of life, the sacred shines forth. Later reflection yielded an absorbing insight. Oxygen is essential to all normal physiological functions and sustains human life. When one is deprived of this vital life-giver, medical interventions raise oxygen levels in the body and enhance the quality of life.

In the spiritual realm, we speak of breath in much the same way. Human life proceeds from the breath of God: "The Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and, the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). "He created the heavens and stretched them out, He spread out the earth and all that comes out of it, He gives breath to its people and life to those who walk on it" (Isaiah 42:5).

Sacred devotional writers of the past practiced contemplative prayer by repeating an invocation (“Jesus Christ, have mercy on me”) and concentrating on their breathing. They talked of “watching the breath,” which they believed calmed the mind and focused their whole being on God. Irene had a phrase she repeated during our visit. It provided focus and brought comfort. “I want to go home,” she said, followed by a gulp of oxygen. She was referring to her earthly home. But I couldn’t help but think of something more.

God has given breath to all things. For all of us, physical breathing will one day cease. Death knocks the breath out of us. Christ’s resurrection assures us of the gift of fresh, divine breath that lasts forever.

TOM UMBEL

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

Question for Reflection

As I center myself with a moment of silence, can I become aware of my breathing and list the things I am grateful for today?

“They talked of ‘watching the breath,’ which they believed calmed the mind and focused their whole being on God.”

LESSONS LEARNED

Sacred Story

I awoke that Saturday morning unaware of what was in store for me that day — that is, until I received a phone call from one of our pharmacy technicians informing me that she was unable to get to work because floodwaters had risen over her road and confined her to her home. She had already called the other technicians to find a replacement, but they all told her they were in the same bleak situation. With my only remaining staff member out of town, the writing was on the wall — I would be the lone pharmacy work force for the immediate future!

Having lived in Floyd County for most of my life, I have seen my share of flooding. Fortunately, my home has never been flooded. However, I have spent time helping others clean up the devastation left behind by a flood disaster. During my drive to Martin that morning, I spent much time in prayer.

When I arrived at Saint Joseph - Martin, the water was rising dangerously close to the hospital, closer than I had ever seen it. I realized that few staff members had been able to get to work. Other employees worked long hours until fellow employees could reach the hospital to relieve them.

Throughout the day, I was reminded of Romans 8:28, which says, “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.” We shall never fully understand what God’s purpose was that weekend in May; however, we can find solace in the fact that God was in control. God placed people in situations chosen for the accomplishment of God’s work. We are merely God’s instruments.

I learned many priceless lessons during the flood, including how grateful I am for my pharmacy staff and how integral other departments are to our success. I learned we really can keep our hospital going in a disaster with few employees. As I left the hospital that Saturday night by boat with the Floyd County Rescue Squad, I realized how truly blessed I am to work with such quality people. Despite the inevitable heartache in the aftermath of such devastation, they would strap on their boots, clean up and rebuild, because that's what we do. We are eastern Kentuckians who have a heritage as proud, honest, hard-working people. We are resilient in difficult times and dependent on faith in God, who will see us through to a better day. We are Martin.

RENEE CHANDLER-HALL

Saint Joseph - Martin

Martin, Kentucky

Questions for Reflection

What am I grateful for today?

Is there a time when I have grown through a loss in my life?

“I learned many priceless lessons during the flood.”

INCARCERATED

Suggested Sacred Text

The Last Judgment — Matthew 25:34-40

Sacred Story

One day while doing routine visits, I noticed a young man (age 29) who was a patient in the cardiovascular unit. I thought it was an unusual place for someone my age to be, so I went in to visit him. He seemed nice enough and had two visitors in the room, so I thought it would be a fairly standard visit.

The patient was named Billy. He complained that he was not able to contact his wife and newborn son and was worried about them. “Why can’t you contact them?” I asked. For a moment, he looked at me rather sheepishly. Then, he answered, “Because I’m incarcerated.”

I looked at the room around me in a new light. That explained the two visitors who had been only half-listening to our conversation. I now saw that they were in uniforms of sorts and wore guns. They were guards, not family members. It also explained why the patient could not contact his wife and son. Billy was only let out of prison because of the severity of his condition; he still had no right to call his wife when he liked. Like it or not, that one word — incarcerated — changed the way I looked at the room around me and the person before me.

But then, something happened that changed the way I looked at Billy once again. He said, “I just don’t want my son to be like me.” Before I, the chaplain, could think of anything to say, comfort came from an unlikely source: one of the guards. She said, “You’re not all bad, Billy. There’s good in you whether you see it or not.” Billy and I were both caught off guard by this comment. Once again, I saw him as I believe God saw him: as a hurting individual in need of comfort because of his fear of the hospital and his longing for his family. God had provided comfort to him through an unlikely source.

The guard's compassion reminded me of God's compassion, which made the moment sacred for me. Billy and I were just two young men talking about things that seemed much larger than either of us. But when I lost perception of who Billy really was, God was kind enough to comfort Billy and refocus me. We were able to talk for a long time about things both big and small. When it was time to go, he asked me to pray for him and his family. God was present for both of us.

COLLIN DOWNING

Penrose-St. Francis Health Services

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Questions for Reflection

How has God recently helped me refocus my lens to see the clear need in front of me?

How do I care for the least of my brothers and sisters in my daily work?

When have I seen the face of God in those I listen to?

“Like it or not, that one word — incarcerated — changed the way I looked at the room around me and the person before me.”

THE TRUE MEANING OF CHRISTMAS

Suggested Sacred Text

1 Timothy 6:17-19

Sacred Story

The Appalachian Outreach Program's "Christmas Partners Project" reminds us of what Christmas is really about. We are thankful for the opportunity to shine God's light and love on citizens of Kentucky who are less fortunate.

Being part of the Appalachian Outreach Program hardly feels like a job most of the time. Traveling through eastern Kentucky, we minister to people's pastoral, social and nutritional needs. In December, we turn into elves who provide Christmas to needy families. Each year, departments from Saint Joseph Health System facilities generously provide gifts, food and clothing. We consider our experiences to be a precious gift, with memories we will never forget.

In December 2008, with the economy in a downturn, we had more individuals and families to serve than ever before. A number of Saint Joseph departments not only gave gifts, but helped deliver them.

The Department of Surgery delivered to a family in Paint Lick. The mother drove to meet them in a compact car, assuming she would receive a couple of packages to store in her car trunk until Christmas. When she saw a truck that was absolutely loaded with gifts and food, she was overjoyed. She hugged everyone and cried.

To resolve the storage issue, the staff took the gifts to the home of the woman's sister-in-law. A nephew, age 15, came out and helped carry presents into the house for safekeeping. As the staff left, the young man hugged and thanked everyone for the wonderful Christmas gifts for his cousins. Never did he indicate that he was sad or disappointed that none of the gifts were for him.

After returning to Lexington, the surgical staff shared their story. Upon hearing of the kindness of the nephew, three nurses donated Wal-Mart gift cards with a total value of \$75. This allowed gifts to be purchased for him: a winter coat, an electronic game and a Wal-Mart gift card with his name on it. When these gifts were delivered a few days later, he was surprised and grateful to receive his own Christmas gifts.

The faces of those served will never be forgotten. We pray they saw Jesus in the staff's generosity and in their faces when they were allowed to share the true meaning of Christmas: the gift of love and of serving others. Making a difference in someone's life is the heart of our mission.

ROSE REXROAT AND BARBARA BAUMGARDNER

Saint Joseph Hospital Appalachian Outreach Program

Lexington, Kentucky

“As the staff left, the young man hugged and thanked everyone for the wonderful Christmas gifts for his cousins.”

Questions for Reflection

How am I making a difference in the lives of others?

How am I reaching out to those in need in my community?

ANN WAS NOT ALONE

Suggested Sacred Text

Preach the gospel always. If necessary, use words. — St. Francis of Assisi

Sacred Story

The call to serve came about 10 p.m. on a Friday. The chaplain asked if I could come to the hospital to stand vigil as part of the “No One Dies Alone” program. The program had just begun and the training was still fresh in my mind. Nervously, I began to ask questions; then, realizing the questions were pointless, I stopped. I was being called to be with someone who was dying, and being present was the purpose.

As I drove to the hospital, I thought of my family, counting my blessings. I prayed to God for strength and wisdom. It was one thing to receive training, and quite another to put it into action. Again, I had to focus on the sacred act of being present for another person during the profound last act of life.

Upon arriving in critical care, my worries about being appropriate in the eyes of the medical staff disappeared. Their words and body language quickly ushered me to Ann’s bedside. The medical staff flew in and out of the room. Equipment, tubes, IV bags, machines and pumps were everywhere, but they graciously made room for me to hold Ann’s hand and speak into her ear.

That’s when all the training left my brain and I scrambled to remember what to do. Again, I refocused on the sacredness of the moment. The point of my involvement was to be there with Ann. Once I centered myself and became a *human being* instead of a *human doing*, the process flowed. Though Ann was not conscious, I believe we prayed, sang, cried and laughed together, sharing a sense of helplessness and togetherness.

The medical staff worked hard to keep Ann present until her family arrived. The vigil lasted about three hours, but it seemed like minutes until the family arrived. After the initial shock of seeing Ann, her family composed themselves and there was a very peaceful moment. I was able to gently lead one family member to the

side of the bed and place Ann's hand in hers, telling Ann that her family was with her and I would be leaving. I thanked her for sharing our sacred time together and quietly left.

I'll never know just what Ann was able to hear or feel, but there was solace and comfort for me, the staff and her family in knowing she was not alone — someone was there to be her eyes and voice. I was there to tell her who was in the room, what was being done, what was going to happen, and how sorry we were that medical interventions would not save her. I shared with her that we would help her through the dying process as best we could, would help her family begin the mourning process, and would not leave her alone until her family or the Lord was there to embrace her.

JILL G. CLARK

Penrose-St. Francis Health Services

Colorado Springs, Colorado

“I was being called to be
with someone who was
dying, and being present
was the purpose.”

Questions for Reflection

How can I be more attentive to the needs of those around me?

How do I care when we can no longer cure?

WHAT MAKES OUR WORK MEANINGFUL

Suggested Sacred Text

For we are God's coworkers; you are God's field, God's building. — 1 Corinthians 3:9

Sacred Story

We work in the financial aid department and are blessed to help many patients at Saint Joseph – London. Here are the stories of a few of these special people.

One patient had to quit working and file for disability at age 62. His family income was below the poverty line, and the family qualified for the state Disproportionate Share Hospital program, which covers the cost of health care at 100 percent. We helped him with numerous bills and paperwork related to his bypass surgery. He and his family still stop by our offices to thank us and to remind us that they will never forget all we did to help.

We love to help the elderly. One elderly gentleman was a charity patient for about three years. While he didn't totally understand what we did, he knew that "the girls at the hospital" would always help him. He could barely walk, but he faithfully came in on the third day of every month to pay his portion of his bill. He always had a hug or a pat on the back for each of us. We were blessed to be able to help him.

There was a hospital employee — a supplemental staff member and full-time college student — who was hospitalized. He was scared and unsure how he would pay the bills. We helped him fill out an application, and he qualified for 100 percent charity care. He was so thankful that we got high-fives and were told how "cool" it was that we have a program like this.

We helped a young lady who was having a procedure due to complications from a miscarriage. She had no health insurance and had not applied for Medicaid. Melissa, who had just had a miscarriage herself, went out of her way to help her and comfort her. Not long after, the young lady became pregnant again and was able to obtain health coverage. This truly shows that there is a God who does answer prayers.

“While he didn’t totally understand what we did, he knew that ‘the girls at the hospital’ would always help him.”

There are many more stories we could tell about how God uses our department to help our community, which makes our work meaningful. Everyone we see has a story. Sometimes, we see ourselves in their stories. Lately, we help more people who have lost their jobs due to the economy. We receive thank you cards, phone calls, even trays of homemade cookies! It’s our pleasure to work here and help those in need.

SANDY JOHNSON AND MELISSA SANCHEZ

Saint Joseph - London

London, Kentucky

Questions for Reflection

What does it mean to see myself in the stories of others?

How does that help form me?

FLOWER POWER

Suggested Sacred Text

Song of Songs 2:10-12

Sacred Story

Kathy, a barely middle-aged registered nurse from California, visited a friend in Colorado Springs some years ago and thought the area was beautiful. When she was diagnosed with terminal cancer, she decided to move here to enjoy the beauty in her final years.

During a meeting with Margaret, the cancer center social worker, Kathy talked about unfulfilled dreams. She spoke of wanting her own home. As a hard-working nurse she had made a good salary, but who could afford California real estate?

When encouraged to pursue her dream, she said, "It seems silly to buy a home knowing I won't be around in a couple of years." The social worker said, "It's not about you dying, it's about you living." Kathy agreed, and bought her first home.

Kathy's new backyard consisted of dirt and a few weeds. She spoke about wanting a serenity garden to sit in, as she expected to be less active as her illness progressed.

A group of radiology and cancer center associates built an elevated garden that covered the length of Kathy's yard. This involved hauling 10 tons of flagstone, dirt, shrubs, trees and flowers from the front driveway to the back yard. We built a stone patio with seating, a pathway through the yard and a water feature.

Kathy would make barbeque for us after each day of work. One of our associates led a prayer before each meal, thanking God for the opportunity to be a part of Kathy's life and for the chance she had given us to serve.

When we were finished, Kathy had a beautiful backyard garden she treasured for the whole summer, especially when she was not feeling well. By midsummer, her garden was a miniature paradise full of life and color. In the fall, when we prepared the garden for winter, she told us how much our fellowship and laughter had meant to her. She would get a little choked up every time she spoke of it and said, “It was the best medicine anyone could provide.”

Kathy lost her fight with cancer the following spring. Although she is no longer with us, the opportunity to live our mission outside of our regular duties was a gift each of us will remember and cherish for a long time to come.

MARGARET PALMER AND JEFF SHAW

Penrose-St. Francis Health Systems

Colorado Springs, Colorado

Question for Reflection

How might I bring greater fellowship, laughter and joy to those whom I will serve or care for today?

“In the fall, when we prepared the garden for winter, she told us how much our fellowship and laughter had meant to her.”

MASSAGING SOULS

Suggested Sacred Text

When the sun was setting, all those who had any that were sick with various diseases brought them to Jesus; and He laid His hands on every one of them and healed them. — Luke 4:40

Sacred Story

For 21 years and nearly 1,800 hours, Herta has been massaging the feet of our patients. I always know it's Thursday when I see Herta walking down the hallway, carrying her kit-box of lotions. I have no idea what her age might be. It's hard to notice anything about her beyond the never-ending smile on her face and the forever sparkle in her eyes.

Herta is a volunteer — a faithful, humble volunteer who offers a very special kind of healing touch to patients at St. Clare Hospital in Lakewood. As she massages the soles of their feet, she also touches their souls with peace, comfort, compassion and reverence.

One day I asked Herta if she had ever had a foot massage herself. Her answer was, "I've never had one. I just give them. That makes me feel good." As our patron Saint Francis said: "Preach always. Use words if you have to."

When I see Herta, I think of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples on Holy Thursday. How fitting that Herta volunteers on Thursdays.

DAVID RAPP

*St. Anthony Hospital
Gig Harbor, Washington*

Questions for Reflection

How might I share the Good News today, with or without words?

When have I experienced a healing touch in my life?

“As she massages the
soles of their feet,
she also touches their
souls with peace,
comfort, compassion
and reverence.”

FEELING 110 PERCENT BETTER

Suggested Sacred Text

Is there any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. —James 5:14

Sacred Story

When I first met the hospice patient, he and his wife were in a crisis. He was gaunt and drawn, his skin stretched over his frail bones and his bristling black beard shot through with gray. He weighed a mere 70 pounds and spent his days and nights in crippling pain, curled in a fragile fetal position. Cancer was eating away at his body and anger was eating away at his soul.

“I’m so worried about my husband,” his wife whispered to me as we stood at the doorway. I knew she was worried about a lot of things: his intolerable pain, his rapid descent, his mental confusion. We had discussed these fears and worries but there was something more, something deeper. “He is so angry at God, I don’t know what to do,” she confessed. We hugged and prayed.

As the patient’s pain began to respond to medication, he was able to tolerate longer visits and even a little conversation. I enjoyed our times together. He was gruff and curious and sometimes even playful. He knew I was a chaplain, but religious talk never seemed to come up. His wife was still very concerned about his anger toward God, but he and I never discussed it.

One day, the patient surprised me with a question. “What does it take to get communion around here?” he asked in his brusque way. I asked him if he would like communion and he said that he thought he would. I told him I would arrange it. He muttered, “Fine,” and fell asleep.

The next day, I went to see the patient. He was dozing in bed, calmly and quietly, but woke up when I came in. When he saw me, a big smile spread across his face. “Hey,” he whispered, “Guess what? A priest came by today and gave me the Sacrament of the Sick and Communion. I haven’t had communion in more than 50 years.” Right before he fell asleep again, he mused, “I don’t understand it all, but I feel 110 percent better!”

As I slipped out of the room, I thought to myself, “I don’t understand it all either, but I feel 110 percent better, too!”

BETSY KAMMERDIENER

*Memorial Hospital
Chattanooga, Tennessee*

Question for Reflection

*A prayer attributed to St. Francis challenges us to “First seek to understand, prior to being understood.”
How might this challenge guide my work this day?*

“‘What does it take to get
communion around here?’
he asked in his brusque way.”

