



A RICH TAPESTRY

Weaving in Commitment

BY MICHAEL RODGERS, M.S.

The American poet Maya Angelou once remarked that diversity makes for a rich tapestry and we must understand that its threads are equal in value, no matter what their color. The image of a multi-colored tapestry seems particularly appropriate as we embrace the concept of inclusiveness that is so much a part of the Catholic health ministry's commitment. CHA's *Shared Statement of Identity* highlights the ministry's dedication of bringing together people of diverse backgrounds in promotion of the common good and justice.

Over the last several years, CHA's commitment to diversity has been evident in a number of areas. Recognizing its importance — especially in the delivery of health care — CHA initially served as a principal sponsor for the Institute for Diversity in Health Management. This national organization operates to expand health care leadership opportunities for ethnically, culturally and racially diverse individuals with the hope of increasing the number of these individuals entering and advancing in the field. To help accomplish this goal, the institute has designed educational programs, summer internships, mentoring opportunities and professional development and leadership conferences. CHA continues to serve as a member of the institute's board and is active in promoting its programs and services.

As changing demographics and the needs of special populations became more evident to the ministry, CHA formed its own committee on diversity in 1998. The group's initial responsibility was to recommend ways of increasing the racial and ethnic composition within the association's governance structures, including the board and its committees. Additionally, the group took on the task of examining best practices by ministry members in their efforts to reach out to traditionally underrepresented populations. Thanks to the committee's work, CHA was able to publish a collection of selected readings from *Health Progress* highlighting ways in which Catholic health leaders have fostered diversity within their respective organizations and communities.

Today, the committee has identified new opportunities to enhance its leadership in and commitment to diversity. It hopes to reinforce and refocus its activities in three principal areas recently affirmed by CHA's board.

First, the committee will continue efforts to educate and advocate for traditionally underrepresented groups in leadership positions and governance roles within the ministry.

Second, CHA will step up efforts to examine and build on collaborative opportunities with the institute and other ministry partners to enhance inclusiveness and foster cultural competency in our respective organizations. This will help CHA members address the health needs of diverse communities where they operate.

Finally, CHA will renew its efforts to aggressively advocate public policies that help to eliminate health disparities. The newly enacted health reform legislation also recognizes the need to address the crucial area of disparities of care.

As the ministry moves forward, we hope these initiatives will help guide our actions and continue to sustain the commitment of CHA and its members to honoring the diversity of the women and men both served in and served by the Catholic health ministry. Doing so will insure that the tapestry of diversity Maya Angelou spoke of continues to be a central value of Catholic health care.

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