



“**M**ission,” “mission-centered,” “mission-driven,” “mission-minded,” “mission-focused,” “mission effectiveness,” “mission integration”—these *mission* words and phrases abound in Catholic health care, and new ones are created almost daily. Underlying them are the deeper realities of faithfulness to the healing ministry of Jesus, Catholic identity, the charisms of the founders, and the legacy of religious orders.

In the minds and hearts of ministry employees, these realities tend to be articulated in plain words that reveal deep understanding. When employees were asked, “What is it about working here that keeps you coming back, day after day, week after week, and—for many—year after year?” some of their answers were:

- We are committed to “making a difference” every day.
- We *live* our commitment to the community—both locally and globally.
- Decisions here are based on our mission.
- The sisters’ work continues in us.
- Here we are able to express our spirituality.
- We care for the poor and needy.
- I am proud of what we stand for.
- There is congruence between my values and the organization’s values.
- People here are all treated the same—whether you’re a housekeeper or a physician.
- I have a sense of being “called” to work here.
- We quietly go about doing our good deeds.
- We do the right thing.
- We are caring and faithful.
- This organization supports a balance between work and life.
- The diversity here is very important to me.
- Decisions here are made at the lowest possible level.

These are the words of employees of Sisters of Charity Health System, Lewiston, ME, a member of Covenant Health Systems, Lexington, MA. The organization is a descendant of Maine’s first Catholic hospital, which was founded in 1888 by the Sisters of Charity of Saint Hyacinthe, Quebec, to meet the needs of the growing immigrant population of French Canadians who had come south to work in the city’s then-flourishing

A Legacy Endures

A Maine System Emphasizes Its Sponsor’s Mission in All Aspects of Its Work

BY MARGUERITE STAPLETON

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shoe and textile factories. In the beginning, the sisters' work included the hospital, orphanages for both girls and boys (which also functioned as boarding schools for immigrants' children), and full care for the elderly.

Today, the system includes St. Mary's Regional Medical Center, a 233-bed acute-care hospital with comprehensive psychiatric and behavioral services; St. Marguerite d'Youville Pavilion, the largest nursing home north of Boston; Maison Marcotte Independent Living, 128 senior apartments; Community Clinical Services, physician practices with more than 60 employee-physicians; and several group homes.

The founding work of the sisters, who were known for doing whatever the community needed, thrives today among the system's 2,000 employees, who have a deep and abiding sense of mission. The work thrives even though only two sisters of the founding community are employed by the system. In this article, I hope to show how the sisters' legacy continues to be carried out.

MISSION ROOTED

Our mission was begun by St. Marguerite d'Youville, the foundress of the Sisters of Charity,

the Grey Nuns. St. Marguerite's story resonates with many of our employees. She was married to an alcoholic. After having given birth to six children (two of whom survived), she was widowed and left, a single mother, with her husband's debts. Even so, she remained deeply committed to the poor and needy.

Many of our employees are surprised to learn that a saint dealt with the same issues they themselves face today. We tell St. Marguerite's story over and over. The first telling occurs in a two-hour session that begins a three-day employee orientation—our deliberate effort to “put first things first.” Every year, we honor four employees who exemplify each of our organizational values: compassion, stewardship, respect, and excellence. These honors, which we call our Marguerite d'Youville Awards, offer us another opportunity to tell her story, as do our annual awards to four individuals or community organizations that we recognize as possessing these same values.

In addition, we occasionally provide information for local children who have chosen St. Marguerite as the topic for a class assignment on heroes and saints. The sisters wisely commissioned a book for children on St. Marguerite's life.

MISSION LIVED

Sisters of Charity Health System remains deeply committed to the heart of St. Marguerite's ministry to the poor and disadvantaged. Our president and CEO, James E. Cassidy, is often quoted

SUMMARY

The Sisters of Charity Health System, Lewiston, ME, a member of Covenant Health Systems, Lexington, MA, remains deeply committed to the mission of service begun by its foundress, St. Marguerite d'Youville. Although St. Marguerite experienced a hard life, her resilience and her commitment to the poor and disadvantaged serve as an inspiration to those who continue her legacy of compassionate care.

The founding work of St. Marguerite and the sisters has helped to foster a culture in which the mission of service thrives among the system's 2,000 employees. This culture can be attributed to two things: the system's organizational values of compassion, stewardship, respect, and excel-

lence; and the recognition of those employees whose work embodies these values.

From the boardroom to the patient room, mission is integrated into each decision and action.

Every two years, each of Covenant Health System's member facilities engages in a mission assessment process that examines various aspects of mission, including Catholic identity, holistic care, care for the poor, mission values integration, ethics and employee relations. In addition, the Sisters of Charity Health System's board has its own standing Mission and Community Committee, which looks strategically at how creatively and faithfully the system is continuing to live its mission.

as saying that it is not enough for us to care for the poor who come to us. We are, he says, mandated by the sisters' legacy to go out into our community and find those who are poor and help them.

As a result, our system undertakes a wide variety of charitable programs as an expression of this mission. For example, our newest physician practice is located in the heart of downtown Lewiston, where many of the needy live. In the same area, we have acquired the Good Shepherd Food Pantry, where last year we provided food to 26,264 people (580,072 pounds of food).

Our four School-Based Health Centers reach another underserved population in our community; the centers provide preventative health care, health education, treatment for minor and acute illnesses, immunization, sports physicals, mental health services, and other services. This year we sent our 11th team of employees and community members to Haiti, where they spent 10 days learning about a Third World nation and helping with medical care (team members work in nutrition centers, emergency departments, and operating rooms). In addition, 27 of the system's employees and six of its departments are sponsoring Haitian children who are pupils in schools run by Grey Nuns. Through a monthly donation, sponsors provide books, uniforms, and lunches for these children.

MISSION SUPPORTED

A good test of how well supported mission is in any organization is the extent to which it is emphasized in the budget and the strategic plan. Our budget reflects a deep commitment to the poor. Over the last four years, we have provided over \$4.3 million per year in free care for people who have no coverage. Our strategic plan refers to mission specifically in goals like the following:

- "Ensure direct access to quality healthcare, disease prevention and health promotion services for potentially underserved populations.
- "Actively participate in outreach activities that promote the common good of underserved members of our community.
- "Generate the financial resources necessary to meet our Mission objectives.
- "Create a culture that supports all dimensions of wellness: physical, spiritual, intellectual, social, occupational, and emotional."


MISSION CELEBRATED


Humans tend to celebrate what they regard as important in their lives—anniversaries, birthdays, holy days, and holidays. Celebrating mission is no exception. For this, our organization has chosen the liturgical feast of St. Marguerite, October 16, creating an entire Mission Week around that date. Over the years, the week has grown organically. It currently begins with a special Mass in honor of St. Marguerite, to which the local clergy is invited (the bishop sometimes presides).

A choir composed of system employees and other members of the community participates. The Mass, which is bilingual, honors the organization's French-Canadian roots. The four recipients of the annual Marguerite d'Youville Awards are honored prior to the dismissal rite. The following morning, a special breakfast honors all nominees, showing that being nominated by a co-worker is in itself an honor. Throughout the week, a "Daisy" cart finds its way around the organization, giving employees an opportunity to purchase (at low cost) small items to honor co-workers for how well they live mission. An employee might, for example, buy a daisy (*marguerite* means "daisy" in French) or a token for a cup of coffee.

Also on the cart are blank certificates. By writing in a co-worker's name, employees can draw attention to his or her good work. During the week, hundreds of these certificates are proudly displayed in work areas or lockers. The cart also offers thank-you cards, coffee mugs, and framed pictures of St. Marguerite.

Mission Week ends with an all-day auction and raffle whose proceeds are divided between two funds, one for local patients, residents, or employees in need, and one for Haiti. The latter money is used to purchase medical supplies and medicines for that country. In 2004, the auction and raffle netted \$34,000. One employee described that day as the one "she looks forward to the most all year."

 Humans tend to celebrate what they see as important.

 Grey Nun historians are eager to share their love of their foundress.

MISSION EXAMINED

Although it is the responsibility of the system's board, CEO, and senior leadership team to hold all things to the light of the mission, a Mission Advisory Committee participates as well. This group of 32 people, representing both management and staff, meets monthly to ensure that mission remains vital throughout the organization. The group manages the Mission Week activities and oversees the work of the Caring Funds Committee, which distributes money to the local needy (and is also available to patients, residents, and employees who are in a crisis situation). This Caring Funds Committee also oversees access to the organization's "Gift of Time," a "bank" of earned time donated by employees for co-workers in need.

Every two years, each of Covenant Health Systems's member facilities engages in a mission assessment process that examines various aspects of mission, including Catholic identity, holistic care, care for the poor, mission and values integration, ethics, and employee relations. In addition, Sisters of Charity Health System's board has its own standing Mission and Community Committee, which looks strategically at how creatively and faithfully the system is continuing to live its mission.

MISSION SHARED

One way the system shares its mission is by sponsoring what we call "Pilgrimages to Montreal," during which we "walk in the footsteps" of St. Marguerite. Board members make the four-day trip annually; employees can go along if they wish. The pilgrims visit St. Marguerite's birthplace, a museum, the original Grey Nuns's hospital, and a soup kitchen in Montreal. Grey Nun historians and storytellers are eager to share their

love for their foundress. The pilgrims always return with a renewed sense of their role in continuing the charism of the sisters.

MISSION ADVANCED

A conscious commitment to spirituality in the workplace is part of our organization's mission. Each year, all employees are given the opportunity to attend a "Work Sabbath." This is a paid workday during which participants attend a retreat at a nearby lakeside center. During the retreat, they look at the meaning of work and the spirituality of work. On any given Work Sabbath, the group comprises both new and long-term employees, men and women, and management and staff. Employees' appreciation for this day is evidenced by their willingness to encourage co-workers to attend and their requests for follow-up Work Sabbaths for themselves.

Meanwhile, daily prayers reflecting a variety of faith traditions are sent to all employees via e-mail (the prayers are also posted for staff who lack access to e-mail). We have been told that some employees are creating personal prayer books made up of their favorite prayers. Other employees have asked that prayers be sent to their home e-mail addresses so that they can include them in their private prayer time. Recently, a former employee asked us to send the daily prayer to her at her new job. One employee likened the daily prayer to her morning coffee. It is, she said, "something I use to get my day going in the right direction. What can I do today to make someone's load a little lighter, to make someone smile, to make a difference?"

AN ENDURING SIGN

The Book of Proverbs tells us that "without vision the people perish" (Prv 29:18). Is it going too far to say that without mission as an enduring sign of our faith, we will perish? I leave the answer to you.

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