

An Enduring Sign



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For some time now, we have been offering readers the ability to comment on articles through the *Health Progress* web pages, and we appreciate the compliments and criticisms we get with each new publication. Our March-April issue on leadership formation elicited a larger-than-usual amount of favorable responses from readers. The reaction certainly makes us pleased, but among those messages was one e-mail that stands out for reasons we never expected.

The message went like this:

Before Katrina, I lived in St. Bernard Parish. I was provided with health care on my job. We moved to another town after the storm and I eventually found a job with a small law firm. I am paid only \$10 per hour and no benefits whatsoever. I am interested in your program and would like to find out how to apply. My daughter has a Louisiana CHIP card, but my son and I have nothing. If you could help me out with this matter, I would truly appreciate it.

My first thought was that I somehow received this e-mail by mistake, but when someone sends a note via our website, there is always a link at the bottom that refers me to the originating web page. I followed that link to an article from our July-August 2003 issue titled "Baton Rouge's 'Virtual Clinic'." The article is about how local physicians and dentists pooled their skills and resources with support from Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center to provide care for the working poor in the Baton Rouge area. I can only assume the woman happened upon the article after an Internet search, and her note to *Health Progress* was probably one of many attempts to secure health care for herself and her children.

After a bit of digging, I found contact information for the article's author, Virginia Pearson, who at the time was a consultant for the Baton Rouge Health Forum. She was understandably surprised to hear that I was calling about an article she had written so long ago, but when I explained the circumstances, she said, "This really makes my day." She was thrilled, as was I, to know that after all this time, an article we both assumed had been forgotten, was connecting a neighbor to much-needed health care services that, sadly, aren't as accessible as they ought to be in this country.

Ms. Pearson took the woman's e-mail address from me and said she would be happy to help her. I hung up feeling quite proud, not for anything I did, but for being a part of this larger Catholic health ministry that continues to extend hope to people and communities in need. And it's quite fitting this e-mail arrived while we were putting together this special issue on Catholic identity. This experience shows, in a small but specific way, how we enliven everything that we profess as a "ministry of the church continuing Jesus' mission of love and healing today."

I urge you to reacquaint yourself with the Shared Statement of Identity for the Catholic Health Ministry, found on Page 17, and recall all those instances when you witnessed our professed commitments come to life. There is no doubt your list will be long, and may even contain some experiences you never would've expected.