

# Angels Walk the Halls



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In putting together this issue of *Health Progress*, I was reminded of something that happened to me in a Catholic hospital long ago.

I had been admitted in late evening to St. John's Mercy Hospital in Springfield, Mo., to give birth to our first child. Because the obstetrician on call estimated the event was yet hours away, I was given an anesthetic to induce "twilight" sleep — a common practice in those pre-feminist days — and my husband was instructed to return home "to get some rest." During a long night in a semi-conscious state, my initial excitement over the imminent birth gave way to loneliness and fear. Perhaps like other women under the influence of "twilight," several of whom shared a large labor room with me, I was crying out. In any case, at what seems in retrospect to have been the lowest point in this saga, I realized that a Catholic sister was at my side, gently stroking my head. If I saw her face, I wasn't able to recall it later, but for many years I could viscerally recall her touch and the reassurance and caring it conveyed.

It was in reading Sr. Fran Ferder's account of Sr. Frances, which appears on pg. 52, that I remembered this experience and realized the extent of the gratitude so many patients and former patients must owe to these "angels of mercy," the sisters and lay professionals who provide pastoral care in Catholic hospitals.

Today, as numerous articles in this issue show, the field of pastoral care is undergoing dramatic changes. It takes a lot of education and formation to develop lay professionals to fill the roles personified by vowed religious women. But the goodwill such professionals can generate attests to the value of doing whatever it takes. No marketing plan by St. John's Mercy in Springfield could have done as much to build its reputation as the combination of good medical *and* spiritual care given to me (in the context of the time), and to countless others.

The biblical foundation of spiritual care is expressed in our cover image, the product of an online scouting expedition by Les Stock, graphic artist for *Health Progress* and *Catholic Health World*. Les, whose intellectual curiosity has become near-legendary during his 20 years at CHA, used Google to find the photograph of "Healing of the Blind Man," one of some 40 sculptures that adorn the celebrated parclose, or choir screen, in the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres. The photographer is Jill Geoffrion, who leads pilgrimages to Chartres and other spiritual sites in France ([www.jillgeoffrion.com](http://www.jillgeoffrion.com)).

Les's sleuthing also turned up a description of the sculpture, made by 17th-century sculptor Pierre Ier Legros. (Work on the parclose began in the 16th century and was completed in 1714, some 500 years after the cathedral was built.) It explains that this work was among a group of sculptures that were set in place the day before Pentecost in June 1683, and, at a reception to view them, "aroused the admiration of the canons."

We hope Legros's representation of spiritual care and the work of our authors arouse your admiration as well.