



Briefing

Judy Cassidy
EDITOR

By June 6, the 50th anniversary of the D-day invasion of Normandy, most of the Catholic Health Association staff had entered the cocoon of a hotel in Philadelphia to work at CHA's annual assembly. Most of us were only dimly aware of the anniversary; for us the assembly is an emotional and hectic time. We delight in reconnecting with old friends and meeting new ones as we juggle work and socializing.

The assembly is also a time for spiritual renewal. Unexpectedly, the meeting's coincidence with D-day made the assembly especially poignant for me.

Feeling isolated from the outside world after being absorbed in the microcosm of the hotel for a few days, I turned on the TV in my room one evening to catch some news. Instead, I saw Bill Moyers talking with veterans who had been among the first to storm the Normandy beaches. Most of the men who were describing their acts of heroism had been only 18 or 19 at the time. Yet, as their leaders and comrades were cut down by unexpectedly heavy artillery and machine gun fire, these boys assumed leadership, making decisions and taking on responsibilities generally assigned to older men. One spoke of acting as a father figure for boys no younger—and some older—than he.

As they told their stories, none of these men described themselves as heroes. They did not attribute their brave acts to an extraordinary love of country or devotion to democracy. They spoke of doing what they had to do because it was their job, a job they had been trained to do and that they were determined to do to the best of their ability. They also spoke with emotion-choked voices of friends lost in battle and strong feelings of responsibility for the men fighting alongside them. Is this notion of personal responsibility for others and for one's job quaintly old-fashioned, an anachronism in a faster-paced, consumerist society? I think not.

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The next evening at the assembly's annual banquet, I watched as CHA's Achievement Citations were presented for programs that are solving particularly difficult problems, reaching out to help people with special social and health needs—the homeless, victims of sexual abuse, persons with AIDS (see p. 42). The heroism of the people who work in these programs fascinated me as had that of the soldiers, for these people do not see themselves as heroes either. They do what they do because they simply must do the best job they can and because they feel responsible for others—the same reasons that motivated those 18-year-olds when they were called to do the impossible.

As I thought of those boys on the beaches, old enough now to be my father, I felt a very personal gratitude and closeness to them. Our lives are linked; they made it possible for me to grow up in freedom, in America.

I think those who serve in Catholic healthcare are linked to the people they help by similar threads. Their belief in people's responsibility for their fellow human beings, for the common good, invigorates the Catholic healing ministry, as well as CHA's efforts to maintain and strengthen this ministry in a reformed healthcare system.

Health Progress, as part of CHA and of the ministry, also plays a role. From time to time you will be seeing articles or advertisements such as the one on p. 80 that may seem somewhat out of the ordinary. Through these, we hope to strengthen awareness that in our actions today we all leave a legacy for the generations that will succeed us.