

The Ministry of Business

Do Everything for the Glory of God



**BY SR. KELLY
CONNORS, PM, J.C.L.**

Sr. Connors is a consultant to religious congregations and a doctoral student in canon law at the University of St. Paul, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

Catholic institutions that were founded by religious institutes have always had a particular character. The current *Code of Canon Law*, promulgated in 1983 and based on the documents of the Second Vatican Council, gives us the language to articulate this special quality. First of all, members of an Institute of Consecrated Life, the church's formal title for what is normally called a religious institute or religious order, are committed to a life "totally dedicated to God, [...] to seek the perfection of charity in the service of God's Kingdom, [... and] they are linked in a special way to the Church and its mysteries" (Canon 573). Superiors, those given a particular charge of administration within and for the institute, are to exercise their ministry "in a spirit of service."¹ Each member has the primary apostolic duty to bear witness to a consecrated life in all that they do.² All of this underlies the core of the "why" and the "how" members of religious institutes embrace their work: "Apostolic action is the very nature of institutes dedicated to apostolic works. The whole life of the members is, therefore, to be imbued with an apostolic spirit, and the whole of their apostolic action is to be animated by a religious spirit. Apostolic action is always to proceed from intimate union with God and is to confirm and foster this union."³

This is the legacy that many non-members of religious institutes are called to carry on in the administration of Catholic institutions. Through this lineage, administration is more than merely maintaining an institution with a Catholic character; it is a ministry in and for the church and the people of God.

The *Code of Canon Law* primarily refers to ministry in terms of the sacraments, mentioning

those who are the ordinary or extraordinary ministers of those sacraments⁴ and sacramentals (Canon 1168). And yet, Title I of Book III ("The Teaching Office of the Church") of the code is "The Ministry of the Divine Word," which delineates the various roles that each member of the faithful, categorized by their state in life, has in proclaiming the Gospel. This is reinforced by several canons which articulate the rights and obligations of the faithful — particularly with reference to proclamation of "the divine message of salvation."⁵

THE MINISTRY

So we are all called to ministry, especially by being witnesses to the Gospel. The corporal works of mercy are a means of witnessing.⁶ It is easy to see ministry in such concrete acts as feeding the hungry, mending the wounds of the ill or infirm and spending time with them. But what about the work of the human resources director, the plant manager, the finance officer or the various administrators? Are these ministerial positions? It would seem that in a Catholic hospital or other facility, they cannot be anything else.

The elements that set Catholic institutions apart from other institutions are the "why" and the "how" we do things. We recognize that the institutions themselves have a mission and that all those who share in bringing this mission to fulfillment are not necessarily members of the Catholic Church. But by accepting to serve in a Catholic institution and a workplace, they have a direct share in this mission. Canon 225.2 gives a clear and concise articulation to the essence of our work:

"According to each one's own condition, they [lay persons] are also bound by a particular duty to imbue and perfect the order of temporal affairs with the spirit of the Gospel and thus to give witness to Christ, especially in carrying out these same affairs and in exercising secular functions."

Administration is more than merely maintaining an institution with a Catholic character; it is a ministry in and for the church and the people of God.

THE BUSINESS

Many years and much work have gone into defining, animating and permeating Catholic institutions with Catholic identity and charism. There is a uniqueness that sets Catholic institutions apart from public institutions, and we believe in the difference it makes; otherwise we would not be engaged in the work that we do. Yet no one can deny that American health care is also a business. Providing quality health care to those most in need in modern American society requires running a good business. As distant as that sounds from our mission statements, that is what it comes down to day after day.

We are professionals and we hire professionals. How else can we provide the excellence of care that we are committed to make available to the most people? The only formal “ministers” we hire are in the department of pastoral services. Yet, at the same time, we believe that working in institutions that share in the church’s mission and promote the apostolic action of caring for the sick (Canon 216) suggests that all involved are engaged in ministry in the name of the church (Canons 116 and 118).

UNITING MINISTRY AND BUSINESS

Although we may have never hired a facilities minister or a minister of human resources, we have in fact expected that all who fulfill their duties at a Catholic institution understand their work as part of the mission of the church. This is the core of the founding mission of many of our institutions.

Keeping the particular mission statement before everyone’s eyes is a fundamental way of animating the Catholic identity of each institution. Everyone can be committed to the mission – the particular mission and that of the church. But does everyone see her or his participation and contribution as *ministry*?

Bringing the two aspects together, ministry and the business of health care, is not an easy task. Canon 225.2 unites them harmoniously, articulating that our “business model” is to imbue the temporal affairs, the daily business of health care, with the spirit of the Gospel, giving witness to Christ. Living the Gospel and witnessing to Christ are clearly acts of ministry, and they have a concrete place in the business of administration, or perhaps more accurately, the *ministry* of administration. If we can keep this subtlety

Everyone can be committed to the mission – the particular mission and that of the church. But does everyone see her or his participation and contribution as *ministry*?

before our eyes as well, it may permeate all that we do with the spirit of the Gospel even more. We have witnessed this and the unique quality that it provides in the work of members of religious institutes and those who have followed their example.

Our bottom line is not profit and it is not success in the business sense; it is the proclamation of the Gospel – proclaimed by everything that we do. We are all sharers in the ministry of the Gospel and in the ministry of health care, and therein lies the exceptional contribution of the Catholic institution. ■



Comment on this column at www.chausa.org/hp.

NOTES

1. Canon 618. Historically, many superiors had dual roles; they attended to the other members of the religious institute as well as to the institution the religious institute had charge of.
2. Canon 673; see also Second Vatican Council, *Perfectae Caritatis*, “The Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life,” 1965, 1, 2, 6, 24; and Vatican II, *Lumen Gentium*, “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church,” 1964, 31 and 44. Both available online at www.vatican.va/archive/index.htm.
3. Canon 675; see also Vatican II, *Perfectae Caritatis*, 8 and 20.
4. Canons 861, 882, 900, 910, 965, 1000, 1003 and 1012.
5. See especially Canons 204, 211 and 225.
6. The corporal works of mercy: feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, visit the sick, visit those in prison, and bury the dead, are rooted in the Gospel articulation of the final judgment in *Mt 25:31-46*. The implication is that the charity we show to one another in this life is the basis upon which we will be judged in the life to come. These acts of charity are external, visible and measurable.

Health Progress®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, September - October 2009.
Copyright © 2009 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States
