

# COLLABORATION IN ACTION

## *A Joint Study Shows the New Covenant Initiative to Be Alive and Kicking*

**C**ollaboration can be defined as a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve results they are more likely to achieve together than alone.

Catholic Charities agencies and Catholic health care organizations are undertaking such relationships by joining forces, responding to God's call to bring about healing. Combining the strengths of their ministries, these partners across the country are delivering innovative services that improve the lives of individuals, families, and communities.

A national study of collaboration, sponsored by Catholic Charities USA and the Catholic Health Association, was undertaken in 2002 to assess the state of collaboration in Catholic ministries across the United States. The study was conducted by Health Systems Research, Inc., and was funded in part by a grant from SC Ministry Foundation. The study documents the current breadth of ministerial collaboration, identifies factors that facilitate or impede effective partnerships, and describes lessons for local leaders. The full report of this study will be available later in 2003.

The study was inspired by New Covenant, an initiative committed to strengthening and promoting the organized expression of the Catholic caring and healing ministries. New Covenant has evolved since its inception in 1995. Although New Covenant still emphasizes collaboration, its focus is now on collaborative relationships—particularly within the church—that create synergy to enhance health and well-being, especially of persons who are poor and vulnerable (see **Box**, p. 14).

Four key findings emerged from the national study:

- Collaboration is occurring across the country. The researchers identified more than 100 collaborative efforts among ministries, ranging from referral programs to extensive joint service initiatives. The researchers visited five sites (St. Petersburg/Tampa, FL; Wichita, KS; Albany, NY; Cleveland; and Orange County, CA) and extensively interviewed leaders from an additional 22 sites by phone.

- Collaboration produces results. Although relationship building is often hard work, leaders from both Catholic Charities and health care organizations pointed repeatedly to enhanced services, strengthened relationships within communities, and improved outcomes for the persons and families they serve.

- The joint efforts are responding to individual and community needs. In the stories told by local leaders, it is clear that the partnerships entail far more than simply combining organizational capabilities. The efforts respond to human need, often in a way that amplifies the effectiveness of the individual organizations.

- Lessons for success are available for ministry leaders. The forthcoming report distills “the best of” key insights from the study for persons looking to start a partnership, optimize their chances for success, and overcome obstacles that are bound to emerge along the way. The lessons emerged from the research and from the many leaders who told their stories to the researchers.

Upcoming issues of *Health Progress* will highlight collaboration efforts at each of the sites profiled by the national study. This issue highlights the collaborative work in St. Petersburg/Tampa, FL (see p. 15).

More important than these individual findings, however, is what the study says about our potential as a united and vibrant church. The stories and the findings are a witness to the mission of



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Jesus in a way that transcends our ordinary ways of thinking about collaboration. As noted by Bishop Joseph M. Sullivan, auxiliary bishop, diocese of Brooklyn, NY, and chair, New Covenant Steering Committee,

Ecclesial collaboration is . . . the work of risk-takers, people willing to take the initiative, who have faith in God, and whose hope sustains them as they hurdle inevitable barriers. Collaboration, however, should not be solely dependent on entrepreneurs who are primarily interested in outcomes and results. It is the design of pastoral planning, of an understanding of the church as community. It rests on the foundation of the human person as a social being—as members of an assembly, a church that sees itself as a mystical body in which all the parts have a role to play, in which each is essential to the health of the whole.<sup>1</sup>

The stories from the study also point to the powerful potential for the church as both a healing and an influential presence in the lives of individuals and communities. Again, from Bishop Sullivan:

New Covenant emphasizes one aspect of the church's mystery, the church as a healing community. As healer, the church is a reconciling community: It reaches out to touch the whole person to restore the individual to a healthy relationship with God and with the community of family, society, and the faithful. The church's mission goes beyond the individual to embrace the broader community, to influence the social order, to bring about right relationships between individuals and the structure of society.<sup>2</sup>

This is the promise of collaboration. It is a promise made real by the stories and lessons included in this document. It is a promise that the whole can truly be greater than the sum of the parts. □

NOTES

1. Joseph M. Sullivan, "Ministering Together," *Health Progress*, July-August, 2002, p. 43.
2. Sullivan.

**NEW COVENANT**

We believe that church ministries can more authentically and effectively fulfill the caring and healing mission of Jesus Christ by working together rather than separately.

New Covenant is a process committed to strengthening and promoting the organized expression of the Catholic caring and healing ministries. Since its inception in 1995, the New Covenant process has evolved with the changing health care environment. Today, New Covenant focuses on a holistic approach to health and well-being, recognizing that healing occurs locally with individuals, families, and parishes, then moves beyond to influence neighborhoods, communities, and society as a whole. Although New Covenant still emphasizes collaboration, its focus is now on collaborative relationships—particularly within the church—that create synergy to enhance health and well-being, especially of persons who are poor and vulnerable.

New Covenant is built on the foundation that the human community lives in constant need of God's healing, recon-

ciling, and caring presence. The church is entrusted with carrying on the ministry of Jesus Christ. Through the centuries, the ill, the orphaned, the widowed, the poor, the homeless, the elderly and dying, the disabled, the uneducated, and others in need have experienced the healing power of Jesus Christ through the church and its healing and charitable services.

Catholic human services, health care, education, and church leaders have come together in New Covenant to shape a shared strategic vision for the future. By uniting their energies and resources, the diverse ministries of the church will have greater power in carrying out the mission of Jesus Christ to those in need and a stronger voice in transforming societal institutions and structures to achieve greater justice and wholeness.

**NEW COVENANT SHARED VISION: A CALL TO MINISTER TOGETHER**

**Who We Are** Leaders and participants in Catholic Charities and other human ser-

vices organizations, Catholic health care, education, parishes, and dioceses.

**Why We Serve** We are animated by the Gospel imperative to further the caring and healing mission of Jesus.

**Our Shared Vision** We commit ourselves to transform our current relationships, structures, and services and to create a stronger, unified voice for justice in order to enhance the health and well-being of individuals, families, and communities. We will:

- Challenge our traditional structures, models, and approaches to ministry
- Advocate more effectively by speaking as one voice on high-priority social and health policy issues
- Link our collective ministries to other community organizations that share our vision
- Leverage the gifts and talents of all leaders in ministry.

*Ministering Together: A Shared Vision for Caring and Healing Ministries, 2000*

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