

Realizing Your Mission



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It may have been 15 years since I last saw the advertisement, but the image of Dan Aykroyd and Sr. Annette Crone, OSF, then a hospital CEO, appearing together in an advertisement titled, "We're On A Mission From G-d" still is etched in my memory. A spoof of the 1970s Blues Brothers film featuring Aykroyd and the late John Belushi, who played a pair of musicians roaming the countryside in search of funds to assist a Catholic orphanage, the ad featured the actor and the administrator of St. Joseph Hospital, Memphis. Both wore sunglasses like the original Blues Brothers; the ad's copy described the mission to raise several million dollars for capital improvements. Aykroyd, in town for a local event, readily agreed to participate and use his celebrity status to help the hospital in its philanthropic efforts. The result was nationwide media attention, access to more donors, and enhanced pride among the hospital staff.

And while few health care facilities have access to celebrities, a growing number have become less shy about promoting their mission (the St. Joseph ad did include next to its logo, "Extending the Healing Ministry of Christ since 1889"). Recently, Harris Methodist Hospitals (www.HarrisMethodistHospitals.org) featured the headline "Faith at Work" in an advertising campaign that described how "caring for people is a calling from a higher power" and how its care "includes the body, mind and spirit."

It's been said that most organizations spend more time writing their mission than telling people how they live it. While Catholic health care entities certainly make their mission real through their healing ministries, they too often don't spend enough time explaining how the words in their mission are realized through specific actions, programs, and services. When examining an orga-

nization's mission, it is helpful to ask the following questions: Do people know the critical role we play in the nation's health care safety net in caring for the poor, vulnerable, uninsured, and underinsured, and in promoting and defending human dignity? Do we promote the community benefits documented in our annual plan at every opportunity possible and to every audience, including employers, policymakers, and the news media? Do we measure community benefits in terms of dollars, resources, and outcomes? Do we create awareness, both internally and externally, of the partnerships among our organizations, Catholic Charities, and other groups? Do we ask our parish nurses to share information about the hospital they represent? Do we showcase our superlative quality, excellent outcomes, and attention to the holistic needs of patients, families and the community? Do we utilize our trustees, volunteers, and associates in spreading the word about our good deeds?

The health care ministry can no longer sit on its laurels and be comfortable with the fact that, according to research, "Catholic hospitals are perceived as caring and compassionate" ("Public Still Views Catholic Hospitals Favorably," *Catholic Health World*, May 15, 2002, p. 8). A great many people still believe that only Catholics, or those with similar religious beliefs, go to Catholic health facilities. Others believe that recent negative media stories are somehow tied in with Catholic health care. Now is the time for action.

WHERE TO START?

But where to start? A first step can include a close examination of the mission statement. Highlight words and phrases and see how they can be converted into specific activities as they relate to internal audiences (employees, physicians, boards, volunteers), patient care (specific services) and the community at large (community

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benefits, outreach, education, and others). Those engaged in the process should represent all sectors of key constituencies.

Many Catholic organizations have a mission effectiveness committee or task force. This group, typically under the leadership of a woman religious, can develop a number of educational initiatives to honor and celebrate the mission, vision, and values, and to implement organization-wide education and programming. The goals usually include promoting the mission and work of the health care ministry, engaging internal and external audiences, and integrating the mission into employees' personal and professional lives.

A second step can include the development of materials that illustrate how the mission is embodied through an organization's staff, programs, and services. Since multiple media exposure maximizes

messages, consider using videos, DVDs, PowerPoint presentations, the Web, and brochures and other printed materials. These materials can be utilized during staff meetings and volunteer and board orientations; at community events; and in presentations to employers, clergy, and other interested audiences. Make sure that these presentations are given by people who are not just knowledgeable about the mission but passionate about it as well.

Encourage volunteers to place these materials in lobbies, the cafeteria, waiting areas, the emergency department and other locations. Staff members or volunteers involved in obstetrics programs or community education classes can hand these materials out or present them as a part of the larger program. Even home health and hospice staff can bring videos and DVDs with them on home visits to show patients and their loved ones.

Five Ways to Bring Your Mission to Life Today

Here are five things organizations can do to emphasize mission.

- During managers' meetings, ask participants to share how each carries out your organization's mission. Ask managers to develop an annualized personalized mission action plan that delineates certain activities that they will perform throughout the year, that is, activities that bring the mission to reality among staff, patients, and the community.
- Ensure that the mission statement appears in all publications, newsletters, and marketing materials.
- Incorporate a mission column in periodicals for employees, physicians, volunteers, and the community. Ask a guest "mission" columnist to relate how he or she lives the mission.
- Recognize teams and individuals who have actualized the mission in their work, home life, and/or community. It's important to include all members of your health care family (physicians, nurses, staff, volunteers, board members and members of the religious sponsoring community).
- Give patients and their families the opportunity to share their stories of healing, hope, or loss. Incorporate these stories in employee programs and publications to illustrate the significance of the mission at work.

MAKE MISSION VISIBLE

Mission-themed fairs encourage departments throughout the organization to sponsor booths, exhibits, and tabletop displays on how each group brings the mission to fruition. Mission and spiritual care personnel should be highly visible and participate in all internal events and programs.

St. Joseph Health System in Orange, CA, has been reaching its staff through a year-long program called Mission and Mentoring (see Ed Giganti, "Mission and Mentoring at St. Joseph Health System," *Health Progress*, May-June 2003, pp. 8-9). Its several hundred graduates have learned about the roles and responsibilities involved in integrating the mission and values of the sponsoring organization, preparing them for greater responsibility for ministry leadership. Following the educational sessions, participants commit themselves to a mission and values integration project to be completed during the next year.

Other organizations utilize the local religious community to help spread the word. By including local religious figures—sisters, priests, rabbis,

ministers, and others representing the entire realm of religious interests—organizations can better demonstrate their role as healer. Visits to local churches, synagogues, and mosques help to reinforce this role while promoting healthy living and disease prevention.

No matter what technique you choose—a Blues Brothers homage or a mission fair—bringing mission to life is essential for every organization within our healing ministry. As Catholic health care organizations, we have a moral and social obligation to maintain and promote a strong, vibrant,

and passionate mission to our community. That is why most of us chose to be stewards of this ministry, and that is what will keep us there. ■

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Key Ministry Messages: Quality, Compassion, Vision, Mission

A broad-based task force of ministry representatives has developed recommendations for how to more effectively communicate the value of Catholic health facilities. Built around CHA-sponsored public perception research, the messaging platform can enhance public attitudes toward Catholic health care.

The Public Perception Project recommends four themes and supporting messages that the research indicates would be effective if integrated into existing communications—quality, compassion, vision, and mission.

According to the research, the first demand of the public is for high-quality health care. It is the top criteria for choosing a hospital, and the public equates quality with having the latest technology and top-notch health care providers. However, consumers also want to know that the care they will receive will be delivered compassionately, and compassionate care is a very close second priority. The research indicates that Catholic hospitals are generally perceived to be compassionate and caring and that the public also appreciates Catholic health care's mission and values, as



expressed through the service and vision of Catholic health organizations. However, research indicates the public also wants to know that Catholic health care welcomes and respects people of all beliefs and traditions.

A CD-ROM-based tool kit provides detail about the research findings and recommended message platform. The material includes suggestions for integrating themes and messages into existing communications efforts. Key recommendations include:

- Integrate the message platform into an organization's communication "infrastructure" and primary communications activities.
- Educate board members, sponsors, doctors, nurses, employees, and volunteers by incorporating the message platform into ongoing internal communication activities.

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