

CREDIBILITY, COMPETENCY, AND CARE

As we approach the joint convening of Catholic Charities USA and the Catholic Health Association of the United States this August in Chicago, the appropriate theme and tone is one of celebration. We will gather to commemorate and celebrate nearly three centuries of compassionate care expressed through these two institutions of the church in the United States. In the long months of planning for the August meeting, the desire to remember what has gone before us in the dedicated lives of men and women and to envision the potential for service that lies ahead of us has been an organizing principle. Undoubtedly this hope and intention to commemorate will be realized precisely because of the dedicated work of our two planning teams.

A shadow, however, hangs overhead as we approach the August meeting. The pedophilia scandal that has dogged the Church's life and ministry since the 1980s has exploded anew, with unique intensity in Boston but with powerful consequences in dioceses across the country. This is not the place to analyze the problem in its multiple dimensions, but it would be less than realistic or even less than honest to ignore the potential impact of this crisis on the social institutions of the church in the United States.

The scandal has at least three major components. The first involves sin and crime; the abuse inflicted upon children and young people was both a grave moral evil and a transgression of civil

law. The Church must address the moral problem internally and is responsible to the wider society to cooperate with legal authorities for past and any future crimes. The second involves the procedures in the church for responding to cases of abuse. The crucial element here is response to the victims and their families; this is the primary moral obligation, but the procedures in place in dioceses for investigating and reporting these crimes must meet some universal standards of transparency and effectiveness. The third dimension of this national problem is its consequences for the pastoral and public life of the church.

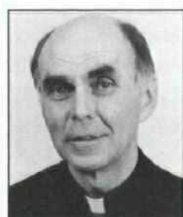
Both of these dimensions of the church's life are threatened by this scandal because it raises the issue of trust. Trust is a hard won essential element of the church's pastoral ministry. Its role was highlighted for me in the juxtaposition of two articles in the *New York Times* "Review of the Week" news section. The lead article was on the Enron scandal; the inside page featured the pedophilia scandal. In the Enron article, the issue raised was whether any institutions can be trusted.

Unfortunately the sentence was applicable to both crises, but even more intensely for the church. For us, the coin of the realm, in human terms, is that the church is trustworthy—in its teaching, its ministry, its service to the young and old, the fragile and the strong. The basic bond that ties people to the church is faith, but trust is essential if the faith of people is to be nourished, informed, and deepened. The immediate testing ground of the sexual abuse scandal is, therefore, in the pastoral life of the church, in the parishes where the vast majority of people are in living contact with Catholicism. An enormous effort will be required to maintain and sustain trust. There are hopeful signs; several news articles strike the note that while Catholics are profoundly shaken and often deeply angry with some bish-

*Celebrating
Our
Tradition
Witnesses to
the Church's
Needs Today*

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ops, they distinguish this from their bond with the church and with their parishes.

The second arena where trust can impact ministry concerns both Catholic Charities and Catholic health care more directly. It is the church's public life and its social ministry. The problem is well stated in a comment in the *New York Times* by Professor Scott Appleby of Notre Dame. Addressing the possibility of the church losing its moral credibility, Appleby said: "It won't just be a crisis, it will be all over but the shouting. There will be no moral credibility for the bishops to speak about justice, truth, racial equality, war, or immigration if they can't get their own house in order." That assertion is like a fire bell in the night for Catholic Charities and other agencies involved in advocacy.

In the last 15 years both Catholic Charities USA and the Catholic Health Association have undertaken systematic, intensive efforts to incorporate the Church's social teaching into their own ministry and to witness to that teaching through extensive programs of public policy and advocacy at the state and national levels. Both organizations now join charity and social justice, direct service, and policy analysis in systematic fashion. While distinct from the episcopal conference, we have worked with the bishops, drawn from their social teaching, and tried to fashion a broad-based social

vision at every level of Catholic life in the United States. The project is both complex and long-term; we are not nearly at a point of synthesis either on issues to be pursued or on fashioning common ground among diverse views within the church. Those of us who have been at this work are realistic about its difficulty. But Appleby's comments identify a new problem; this scandal threatens the moral integrity of the wider ecclesial community. It's not about fashioning the right integration of moral analysis and empirical judgments on a given issue of policy; nor is it about finding the right mix of judgments around which we can

build a consensus on welfare reform or health care advocacy. This is about what kind of an institution we must be to gain and hold the public's trust. It is more difficult than the pastoral questions because we are seeking to be understood and to be seen as trustworthy by civil society, by people and groups who are not related to the church by faith, but by an evaluation of our moral character and our role in society.

It is at this point where I believe the work and witness of both Catholic Charities and Catholic health care are most relevant to the present crisis in the church. We are both institutions located at the fault line where a ministry of care engages the broader society. We are rooted in the Catholic tradition but serve society without distinction and serve it through the dedicated professional commitment of people of many faiths. Appleby puts squarely on the table the issue of Catholic credibility. Neither Catholic Charities nor Catholic health care are the primary places where the pastoral and policy decisions will be made about putting the church's house in order. But credibility and trust must be rebuilt and solidified on several fronts. The challenge is too large and too diffuse to be met by any single group in the church, hierarchy, or laity. Both Catholic Charities and Catholic health care are already sources of credibility. We are known throughout society; we have been effective agents of partnership with government and with the private sector. But the past is now challenged by the present, and even though the sources of scandal have not originated in our organizations, we have an interest in and a commitment to the broader public life of the U.S. church.

We have two great resources that are essential to restoring public credibility: professional competence translated into compassionate care. Competence is charity disciplined and transformed into specific abilities to meet human needs. Competence in multiple ministries—education, social service, health care—is the vehicle through which Catholic social vision takes concrete shape in the lives of people throughout this society. Competence is the means by which compassionate care is given effective meaning in the lives of those who are vulnerable, in need, or in pain. Credibility—of which trust is an essential element—is built slowly over time; it is the product of thousands of individual actions and of a pattern of consistent service. The very tradition we will come together to celebrate is precisely the kind of competent and compassionate witness the church needs today to overcome the doubts sown by scandal from which we suffer.

We should celebrate in August and we will, but we should also be aware of how crucially needed our witness will be in the months and years ahead. □

Strengthening Individuals & Families

Catholic Charities served 3,142,167 people in 2000

- Child and adult day care
- Respite care
- Welfare-to-work programs
- Employment and transportation services
- Individual, family, and group counseling
- Mediation
- Mental health services
- Family, parenting, and marriage education
- Drug and alcohol awareness programs
- Treatment, prevention, and maintenance health programs
- Therapeutic and supportive services to people at risk of abuse or neglect
- Assistance to single or married parents
- Clinical and supportive services to individuals and families with addictions
- Domestic infant, special needs, and intercountry adoption services
- Services to adult adoptees and birth parents
- Clinical services to disabled, abused, and neglected

