

## EDITOR'S NOTE

**W**e read the Scriptures for instruction and inspiration, comfort and wisdom, deepening our faith and following the heart of Jesus. Occasionally I get stuck, and instead of growing from the real lesson of the reading, I follow my own flawed interpretation and get to a message not intended and not helpful. Two of those occur when I read the parable of the prodigal son and the passage in Luke about Jesus comparing the task-oriented Martha to her contemplative sister Mary.



**MARY ANN  
STEINER**

I know the message of the first is about God's unfathomable forgiveness, and the second is about Jesus' great love of relationship, but pettiness gets the better of me as I identify with the prodigal's steadfast older brother and Mary's busy sister. Does Jesus really not have a kind word for those who fed, watered and slaughtered the fatted calf, those

who cooked, cleaned and prepared for the distinguished visitors?

There are more Marthas than Marys in my experience. A few prodigals make occasional dramatic appearances, but there is an abundance of older sisters and brothers who quietly grow the business, uphold the ministry and carry on the legacy. It seems to me that Catholic health care is filled with Marthas and big brothers who *don't* whine. They make lists, outline strategies, set priorities, relieve pain, advocate for the underserved and lead difficult conversations, because those are all parts of the call to service.

This issue of *Health Progress* recognizes some of the critical issues that populate those lists and determine those priorities. It explores how Catholic health care is responding to the mind-boggling pace of change within the industry and how it stays true to the heart of Catholic identity.

The authors who wrote for this issue explored subjects that range from how the clergy sexual abuse scandal affects Catholic health care to expressing joy in the ministry. They probed the steps of discernment in mergers and acquisitions,

discussed clinician burnout and strategies for resilience, and identified disruptors in health care and in the broader culture that both challenge and affirm our mission. To the Marthas among us, the presentation of these major topics provides fodder for gratitude lists as well as to-do lists. For the Marys, it is fertile ground where they can lead us to pause, pray, discern and re-purpose.

Soon the liturgical calendar moves from ordinary time to the season of Advent. The ordinary days, which are predictably fruitful, give way to a time of waiting and preparing for the new beginning that has been promised. Anyone who has paced outside the surgery suite, awaited the phone call about a longed-for birth, dreaded the impending announcement of layoffs, or kept vigil for their beloved spouse during a long tour of duty knows that waiting is not for the faint of heart. To prepare well usually means preparing for more than one option: more answers than questions asked in the interview, more financial forecasts than the one that got you started; more strategies for growth or partnerships than could have been imagined a decade ago.

As this issue of *Health Progress* came together, it raised the possibility of another kind of advent. In a landscape of so many changes and challenges, we look for signs of new ways for Catholic health care to flourish and new ways for its ministries to serve. We prepare for the many possibilities and wait for the Spirit to guide us. Fortunately for us, preparation brings out the best of Martha, Mary and hardworking brothers. We work and we pray and, as Sr. Doris Gottemoeller reminds us, we sing as we go.

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