

WE SEARCH FOR COMFORT, WE FIND IT ALL AROUND

Things are buzzing here at CHA in these early spring days, due in part to the long-awaited passage of a health reform bill, in part to preparations for the upcoming Assembly. Its theme this year is “Strengthening the Ministry Through Turbulent Times,” but paradoxically perhaps, I’ve been thinking a lot about comfort.



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I found some for myself on a recent six-day trip to Arizona, hiking high desert trails north and south of Phoenix. The poppies and lupine splashed across the hillsides; the air, just warm enough, felt delicious; and the sun brought respite from a long, gloomy winter in St. Louis. More than ever, it seemed, nature delivered on its promise of solace and peace.

In the week I was away, my 91-year-old mother was admitted to the hospital where she found a measure of comfort, as it happened, in the quiet confidence, ready smiles and offers of extra help from the staff. Though she had complaints aplenty about the condition that landed her in bed (not particularly serious, I might add), she was quick to qualify them with words of appreciation for the technicians and doctors, and especially the nurses — those conduits of mission, according to Kathleen Sanford (see page 11) — who slipped in and out of her room.

Then, too, I have noted from reading, mostly in newspapers and magazines, that many others are talking about comfort of late and finding it in not-so-unexpected places: home, food, family, music. Have you noticed for instance that wearisome news reports related to our nation’s uncivil political disputes and its economic woes are relieved by a seemingly vast number of articles about what we eat, where and how our food is produced, the quest for sources closer to home, in gardens and farmers’ markets, about cooking from scratch? I even recently read an article about raising chickens in one’s backyard, apparently something of a trend.

An article I particularly liked was “How I Was Laid Off — and Learned to Love Life Again,” by Dominique Browning, published March 28 in *The New York Times Magazine*. Browning had been editor of *House & Garden* for 12 years when Condé Nast closed the magazine in 2007, leaving her without an office to go to for the first time in 35 years. How did she adjust? She ate. She cooked. She gardened. She read Dante. She returned after a long absence to the piano, occupying herself through sleepless nights by playing Bach.

Another example is a book by Paula Butturini being widely reviewed this spring. She found in food a path through her husband’s long depression. Both Butturini and her husband, John Tagliabue, are journalists; he was wounded in the line of duty. In *Keeping the Feast: One Couple’s Story of Love, Food and Healing in Italy*, Butturini writes that immersing herself in the dailiness of life, preparing meals, sharing with family and friends, not only kept her grounded but eventually brought healing.

As it is often good in a short piece of writing such as this to circle back to the beginning, I return to the topic of the CHA Assembly, only to reflect that its theme in the context of comfort may not be so paradoxical after all. To strengthen the ministry of Catholic health care is to assure continuation of its historic, multi-dimensional mission of comfort. And for all of you, our readers who sustain and carry it forward, the coming-together days in Denver, a time for exchanging stories of the work and struggles, of supporting one another, of breaking bread and sipping wine, are surely an excellent way of finding in these turbulent times some comfort for ourselves.

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