

EDITOR'S NOTE

“Thirst!” Jesus cried out from the cross, and someone standing below dipped a sponge in common wine to moisten his lips and relieve his thirst. Just a few pages later, John recounts the exchange between Peter and the risen Lord as he is entrusting the church into Peter’s hands. The apostle who three times denied Jesus is asked to declare his love three times as Jesus repeats his question “Simon, son of John, do you love me?” Each time Peter expresses his love and insists that the Lord knows that he does, Jesus gives him a slightly different charge with which to carry out his love: Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep. (John 19:28; 21:15-17)



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Feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty. Food and drink were elements of Jesus’ miracles and encounters second only to those of healing; from his first public miracle of turning water into wine, to the woman drawing water from the well, to the loaves and fishes for the multitude, to his final miracle carried out with bread and wine, Jesus was concerned with food, drink and nourishment. As a learned rabbi himself, he echoed the Father’s miraculous provisions for his people in the stories of Moses, Elisha and Elijah.

It is not miracles we’re counting on these days. We don’t expect manna to fall from the heavens on the food deserts of inner cities, water to spring from rocks in the fields of rural America, loaves and fishes to multiply on the shelves of local food banks. When Jesus gave Peter his instructions for leading the newly formed flock, they were simple commands to feed them and tend to them.

This issue of *Health Progress* focuses on how Catholic health care is carrying out the mission to feed and tend. The social determinants of health — a term for the conditions and circumstances that affect the health and well-being of individuals and communities — include factors that can either advance or obstruct a person’s ability to flourish. They include education, access to abundant clean water and healthy food, proper housing, safe neighborhoods, educational opportunities, solid community supports and good health care. We decided this was so large a topic that we

will divide our attention to social determinants of health among three issues of *Health Progress*. This first one focuses on the basic needs of food and water.

The articles that follow explore equitable distribution of resources, the prevalence of food insecurity and how health care professionals can better screen for it, problems that outdated infrastructures for water supply are causing for poor and marginalized people, the benefits of growing and buying local, and how climate change is affecting farmers’ decisions in raising the crops and livestock that provide food for our tables. We thank this group of authors for the expertise and insights they shared with us.

The Catholic health ministry has a sacred legacy in carrying out the corporal works of mercy. We are blessed to feed people who are hungry, provide drink to people who are thirsty, welcome strangers to a new land and care for people who are sick or wounded. Catholic health care’s other legacy — ministering by the principles of social justice — calls us to attend to social determinants of health so we are not only responding to hunger and thirst with one serving of food and one glass of water at a time, but also changing hearts, opening minds, advocating for policies, preserving resources, protecting the environment and honoring God’s people with what they need to lead full and rewarding lives.

World Water Day is Friday, March 22. Drink deeply from a glass of clean water. Take a very short shower. And check out CHA’s prayer and video for World Water Day at www.chausa.org/environment.

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