

WHERE PERSONAL MEETS PROFESSIONAL

The inspiration for our Sept.-Oct. issue's theme will be clear to anyone working in acute or long-term care — new Medicare reimbursement rules calling for better coordinated care for our aging population. I imagine, though, that many readers have, as I do, more than a professional interest in all that's happening. For example, my own interest peaked earlier this year when my 93-year-old mother moved to a long-term care facility. Howard Gleckman, author of the article that leads this issue, has assured me that I need not apologize for this. In a conversation with him during the editing process, I tucked a question inside an anecdote about the facility where my mother lives.



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"I'm sorry to personalize this, Howard," I began, "but ..."

"Pam, don't worry about personalizing," he interjected. "Everyone does."

Then I remembered that Gleckman's own expertise in elder care developed out of personal experience. Those who have followed his contributions to CHA over the past three years may remember that his book, *Caring for Our Parents*, is based on his frustrating efforts to find resources for his aging relatives — a quest that threw him into a complex and unfamiliar world. His first article for *Health Progress*, in 2009, came soon after publication of that book.

Moving beyond the considerable complexities of our topic, though, I want to turn the spotlight on two articles in this issue that go deeper — one related to the elderly, the other not. The first is Gordon Self's "Theological Vision Drives Quality Senior Care"; the second is Sr. Patricia Talone's "Your Conscience and Your Vote."

Among the insights that make Self's reflection especially compelling for me is his observation that creative models of care, those that invite and allow people to flourish, flow from a theological vision — "a theological vision of the inherent gift of the aged who, despite infirmity and dementia ... are nevertheless a presence" and "a prophetic word."

My mother has dementia of fairly recent onset and is in a "home-like setting" which, I believe, qualifies as one providing "a creative model of care." It specializes in all levels of what those in the field now euphemistically label "memory care." I visit her frequently and have been surprised to find that what I might once have anticipated as an unpleasant or even odious duty has actually become an enjoyable pas-

time for me. I have not only learned to converse with people whose mental acuity is waning; I frequently take delight in these exchanges, as well as in joining them in their simple group activities.

I have found, to my surprise that a person does not need a working memory, or even the ability to form a sentence, to inspire reverence or to serve as a "wisdom figure." I have discovered what perhaps many Catholic health providers have long known: that simply being in the midst of these people, as they endure their peculiar form of suffering, enlarges both my vision and my heart. Among insights I relate to in Gordon Self's reflection is this one: "The elderly also teach us about being faithful to our life experience, no matter where God leads, even unto suffering and death."

I am reminded, too, of something the noted Lutheran historian Martin E. Marty once said: Holiness is portable; spaces are made sacred not by their purposes, but by the interactions that take place within. In a recent email exchange, Marty added: "We experience the holy in special times; not just Passover or Christmas, but when the cup of coffee is poured for the chilled person, and held when the hand is shaky."

The other article I find moving is Sr. Patricia Talone's, "Your Conscience and Your Vote." Not only is it replete with wonderful quotations and images, like Gordon Self's reflection, it probes who we are as believers. "Wrestling with conscience," she writes, "engages the believer at that deepest core of the self where one listens attentively to the call of the Lord, while it simultaneously engages the follower of Christ in relation to the Gospel and church teaching."

Would that we all hold tightly to Sr. Pat's insights as we approach the November elections, and to Gordon Self's as we stare into our futures as, willy-nilly, the aging persons who we are.

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