

## EDITOR'S NOTE

People long to connect with community, to believe their work is meaningful and to feel spiritually whole. At CHA, we've certainly been asked by the membership to focus on well-being and caring for the whole person.



**BETSY  
TAYLOR**

And this issue of *Health Progress*, along with previous ones, reinforces that shared identity can make a difference in Catholic health care systems. In the opening article of this issue, two authors with longtime ties to Catholic health care, John Shea, STD, and John Mudd, JD, JSD, explain that they've found one of the best ways to allow Catholic identity to thrive is to not water it down. This includes not only using language and examples that others understand, and finding connections that resonate with people who have diverse backgrounds and experiences, but also knowing that the faith's central messages resonate broadly and remain timeless and powerful.

*Health Progress* has included a few articles in recent issues where health care executives in human resources, mission and formation are increasingly collecting data, while from relatively small sample sizes, showing that the Catholic identity of the ministry work can be a recruitment and retention factor for some employees. Ascension's Vice President of Ministry Formation and Mission Integration Sarah Reddin, D.HCML, makes that point in this issue as well, noting that one of Ascension's leadership programs has found participants much more likely to stay with the system for at least two years than those who do not take part.

This resonates as being all the more striking

because from the 1970s to the 2010s, Catholic Mass attendance in the United States dropped by roughly half, according to a survey highlighted in a recent *National Catholic Register* article. The less populated pews have become even more pronounced after the height of the COVID pandemic, as parishioners have not returned to prepandemic numbers.<sup>1</sup>

If we know the central, beautiful truths of Catholicism have lifted believers across millennia, and we know that people are actively seeking ways to feel connected and whole, is it possible that Catholicism needs to improve its invitation and approach, perhaps to focus less on what divides us, and more on what we share in common? That is, maybe not further refine the message itself, but instead its delivery?

While it is not a Catholic concept, one that I return to is *tikkun olam* from Judaism, the concept of engaging in acts of kindness to repair the world. As we embark on a new year, I am always filled with hope — hope that I may bring my best self both to my work and my life outside of it. And I also hold hope that as people search for meaning and healing, we may offer the hand of hope or healing they seek.

### NOTE

1. Joan Frawley Desmond, "The Catholic Church Battles to Fill the Pews," *National Catholic Register*, Dec. 1, 2022, <https://www.ncregister.com/news/the-catholic-church-battles-to-fill-the-pews>.

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