

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Cecil B. DeMille's last great film epic was my first experience of a disaster movie. Sr. Elizabeth Ann decided that all the children in her Catholic school would benefit from the story of God's power and wrath against the Egyptians and the might of his saving hand for Moses and the Israelites. She sent a message home in the Friday folders that parents should take their children to see "The Ten Commandments" at our neighborhood movie house. Not many parents dared question Sr. Elizabeth Ann, so the following Sunday we filled the Brentwood Theatre.



MARY ANN  
STEINER

Based on the book of Exodus, the movie featured disasters of every order in shocking Technicolor. Pharaoh's cruel treatment of the enslaved Hebrews was religious violence and the slaughter of their infant boys ethnic cleansing. There were plagues and pestilence that spoiled the drinking water, infected the people, decimated their livestock and blighted their crops. Punishing hail, lightning and an unnatural darkness that persisted for days epitomized extreme weather events. There were miraculous rescues, heroic confrontations and finally the scene of the hapless Egyptians drowning in the Red Sea. I had nightmares for months.

Some of us know disasters of severe weather, eruptions of mass violence or rampant epidemics firsthand, but many more of us know them by the numbers. How many days, how many dead, how many inches of rain, how many acres burned, how much the cost, how many shooters and how many victims. And then the flooding of information: how many stories, how many clicks. Alexander Garza in his article (p. 8), addresses the distressing number of children killed by gunfire in St. Louis this past summer. Each time another child was slaughtered intentionally or by random gunfire, their picture was added to the composite of those who died before them, like a tile finding its unfortunate place in a mosaic. God bless the child.

We almost didn't use the image on the cover of this magazine because some of us kept confusing what was meant to be a compass of compassionate action with a stopwatch for how much time there was to respond and rescue. In the end, it turned out to be a helpful ambiguity. Finding our way to the true north of compassion, discussed in David Addiss' article (p. 39), goes hand-in-hand with

the carefully calibrated plans of urgent response. Catholic health care encourages a forward-bearing approach: We operate with a true hand of compassion as well as a steady hand of response.

When Moses first encountered the burning bush, God immediately told him to remove his sandals because the place where he was standing was holy ground. The ground we stand on, whether it's burning, quaking, flooding or tainted with blood, is always sacred ground when we are doing God's work in the healing ministry. Thanks to the articles that follow, there is much to learn about building cultures of safety, learning efficiencies of response, and attending to the social and environmental factors that play into the causes and consequences of disasters. As author after author points out, there also is much to be grateful for in the expertise, diligence and generosity of our colleagues, who guide the discernment of disaster response preparations and uphold the highest standards of care when many people are at risk.

Once again, we are fortunate to welcome a guest author who helps us celebrate *Health Progress'* 100th anniversary. Ron Hamel, former CHA senior director of ethics, wrote a history of the development of the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, often called the ERDs or the Directives, which is the document that offers moral guidance, drawn from the church's theological and moral teachings, on the values, identity and clinical aspects of Catholic health care delivery. Many thanks to Ron for tracking the important decisions that shaped the ERDs and offering suggestions for the topics to be considered in a future seventh edition.

It's my favorite season, with Advent soon to follow. "I know well the plans I have in mind for you," says the Lord, "plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope." (Jer 29:11). We are always preparing the ways of the Lord.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

[www.chausa.org](http://www.chausa.org)

# HEALTH PROGRESS®

---

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, November-December 2019  
Copyright © 2019 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States

---