

EDITOR'S NOTE

Do you get out of your comfort zone? Do you visit neighborhoods you're not usually in, or occasionally strike up a conversation with someone new to get a fresh point of view, some thoughts different from your own?



**BETSY
TAYLOR**

I ask because as I'm thinking about what it takes to build and strengthen healthy communities, I think it takes great understanding, the kind of understanding that can only come from stretching a bit — whether one's mind or one's legs — and realizing that people can have different realities residing within the same communities.

Do you ever think about which direction you turn on a walk? What highways you tend to take, or avoid? What neighborhoods you're unfamiliar with, and why that might be?

This issue of *Health Progress* is themed around Building Healthy Communities. Those doing this work offer food for thought on steps and approaches to identify needs; foster dialogue; and gather the information, tools and funding for structures that can improve environments and health.

The issue opens with an article asking, "What are indicators of a healthy community?" The factors identified in the article may be different from your own (or perhaps right in line with your views). It provides a wise stepping-off point for those listening, thinking and taking action to support healthy places to live, work, learn, play and pray.

We strive to get voices and examples of great work being done both inside and outside of Catholic health care. Good ideas and collaborations can come from anywhere, and while we often highlight the wonderful work of Catholic institutions, we also like to place that work in a wider context.

Philip Alberti, founder of the Association of American Medical College's Center for Health Justice, takes an insightful look at what it really means to build and maintain trustworthiness in

health care.

Jaime Dirksen, Trinity Health's vice president of community health and well-being, takes a deep dive into explaining how that health system is measuring community benefit and community impact work. The system focuses not just on the top identified needs but also on long-term structural change in its work for healthy communities.

As the Christmas season has moved into the new year, it may be a particularly fitting time to think about strengthening healthy communities. I think of Mary and Joseph far from home, and that Mary had to lay the newborn Jesus in a manger. The scene on the mantle looks serene, with the wise men and the glowing star, but it is a reminder that we are called to care for those most in need, those for whom there is no room at the inn.

The mission column describes Avera's Community Health Resource Center in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, and how its staff, including community health workers, has helped more than 250 people — many of them new immigrants and refugees — in its first year. Karla Keppel, CHA's mission project coordinator, was so moved by the descriptions of the work there that she wrote a related reflection to guide people to contemplate sense memories that may lead them to think about what human flourishing personally means to them.

The other phrase that surfaces for me as the Christmas season turns into the new year is "hark," as in "Hark! The herald angels sing," from the Christmas hymn. Hark means listen. It means pay close attention. And that is an important early step in understanding one another. It serves as a reminder that listening to those in communities — who know needs as well as available resources and how to problem solve — is an important part of moving toward the peaceful, healthy communities we all seek. Happy New Year, and all the best to each of you in 2024!

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