

# EMBRACING GLOBAL UNITY FIRST IN A ‘WHAT’S IN IT FOR ME’ WORLD

*“In a divided and troubled world, the Holy Spirit teaches us to walk together in unity.”<sup>1</sup>*

— POPE LEO XIV

Catholic health institutions in every corner of the world serve as beacons of hope, compassion and healing. From urban hospitals to remote rural clinics, the healing ministry continues to respond to the needs of communities with special attention to the most vulnerable. As global health challenges grow more complex and interconnected, the global realities provide us with an opportune time to reexamine our strategy and respond appropriately.



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The U.S. government has taken a different approach to global health and development under the current administration. This new approach began in January 2025 with the dismantling of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and much of our U.S. foreign development assistance. This shift has consequences that are important to us as Americans and as Catholics.

According to an analysis published in the medical journal *The Lancet*, from 2001 to 2021, USAID-funded programs prevented nearly 92 million deaths across 133 countries, including more than 25 million deaths from HIV/AIDS. The researchers went on to estimate that more than 14 million people could die over the next five years because of the dismantling of USAID.<sup>2</sup> The ongoing global realities and the U.S. change in strategy have opened the door for other nations to follow with reductions in their health and development funding.

More recently, the State Department’s “America First Global Health Strategy” was released in September 2025. A recent editorial in *BMJ* argued that “The title openly clashes with long-established global health values of multilateralism and international cooperation.”<sup>3</sup>

## BUILDING TRUST, OPENING DOORS

As a result of these ongoing shifts in global health,

humanitarian aid and development, CHA and our Global Health Advisory Council have had conversations with leaders from around the world, including Catholic health care, bishops’ conferences, dioceses, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and academia. The dialogues have reiterated Pope Leo’s assertion from the quote noted earlier that we should “walk together in unity,” and that “America First” doesn’t make sense as a global health strategy for the universal Church.

While there are many opportunities for future collaborations, one specifically identified was the need for more conversation, collaboration and coordination among Catholic health leaders and partners worldwide. The power of ongoing dialogue and connection among Catholic health leaders is already bearing fruit. Consider the example of a recent visit facilitated by CHA, where a Tanzanian priest engaged with multiple U.S.-based partners to discuss strategies to continue meeting the needs of his community, despite recent shifts in global health support. Through introductions and support from CHA, he is now exploring partnerships with:

- Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach for supply chain support.
- World Telehealth Initiative for physician and nursing assistance.
- A philanthropist for improvements to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) in health care facilities.

On the WASH front, a conversation has led to a funder’s promise of a grant commitment to the

Tanzanian Episcopal Conference (the assembly of Catholic bishops in Tanzania). This funding will launch a circuit rider pilot program, providing human resources and financial support to assess WASH needs and offer formation for staff and communities across a diocesan network of health facilities.

Another example stems from conversations involving the same priest and a former regional CEO of a U.S. Catholic health system. This introduction led to a tentative agreement for this former executive to support the Tanzanian Episcopal Conference with an initial site visit, and potentially long-term assistance in project management and assessment of their 400-plus health institutions.

More such stories have unfolded from Catholic Relief Services, Catholic Medical Mission Board, Hospital Sisters Mission Outreach and the ministries of Catholic health systems in the U.S. and around the globe that underscore the transformative potential of regular convenings and sustained dialogue.

As we engage with these health leaders, we recognize these connections are not isolated. They result from intentional, ongoing conversations that build trust and open doors. We also recognize that the Global South is not merely a recipient of aid, but an important driver of innovation and resilience now and into the future.

### **A VISION FOR GLOBAL SOLIDARITY**

Based on these examples and ongoing conversations, nearly all involved in the global Catholic health ministry agree: The time has come for Catholic health leaders worldwide to unite both intentionally and consistently across borders, cultures and disciplines to sustain and strengthen the global Catholic health mission entrusted to us for more than two millennia. It is time for us to envision a global Catholic forum for health and healing to elevate human dignity and bring unity to our response to the rapidly changing environment.

At its heart, we believe we should bring together a forum/collaborative of Catholic health leaders committed to:

**Global solidarity and collaboration** by building relationships across continents to share resources, innovations and best practices.

**Ethical leadership** by representing Catholic values in global health forums and advocating for equitable, person-centered care.

**Capacity strengthening** through offering training, technical assistance and leadership development tailored to diverse contexts.

**Knowledge exchange and research** by promoting evidence-based practices informed by Catholic social teaching.

**Mission integration and spiritual support** by creating space for reflection, spiritual renewal and alignment with the Church's healing mission.

From what we have heard, this should not be merely a professional network, but a community united by a shared commitment to serve the sick, the poor and the marginalized.

### **WALKING TOGETHER IN UNITY**

There is a vibrant tapestry of potential collaborators for this type of community. They include national and regional Catholic health associations, Christian health associations that cooperate with Catholic bishops' conferences, health ministries of bishops' conferences, Catholic universities and research centers, Catholic health training institutions, Catholic NGOs and the many partners with whom these organizations cooperate to live out our shared mission.

A broad network would reflect the global reach and depth of the Catholic health ministry. By providing space for dialogue and collaboration, we can "walk together in unity" as we harness our collective wisdom and resources to respond to changing realities and share opportunities to address ongoing health challenges.

### **EMBRACING MISSION THROUGH COLLABORATION**

As Catholic health leaders, we are stewards of a rich legacy of compassion, justice and unwavering commitment to every person's dignity. The current global reality provides a renewed reason to continue building on that legacy together, forging new pathways of solidarity and service.

Let us not wait for the next crisis to compel our unity. As the new U.S. global health strategy points out, the challenges before us are too significant for any nation or ministry to face alone. Let us choose collaboration now, inspired by the Gospel and guided by the Spirit. The future of Catholic health ministry depends on our willingness to come together regularly, intentionally and faithfully to continue Christ's healing work in our world.

CHA's Global Health networking calls have

shown what is possible when we unite in dialogue and solidarity. While it is not the long-term solution, as a first step, we invite colleagues from the U.S. and worldwide to join these conversations and continue the journey that Jesus began.

#### TIME IS NOW FOR CONNECTING, COLLABORATING

The world needs our witness more than ever. However, as noted in this column's title, it shouldn't be "What's in it for me?" It should be "What's in it for us?" As Pope Leo said, let's "walk together in unity" to heal our divided and troubled world.

*Reach out to Bruce Compton at [bcompton@chausa.org](mailto:bcompton@chausa.org) to provide insights or to join the conversation on how Catholic health can further uphold Catholic social teaching in its global health initiatives.*

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#### NOTES

1. Pope Leo XIV, "Homily of the Holy Father Leo XIV," The Holy See, June 7, 2025, <https://www.vatican.va/content/leo-xiv/en/homilies/2025/documents/20250607-veglia-pentecoste.html>.
2. Daniella Medeiros Cavalcanti et al., "Evaluating the Impact of Two Decades of USAID Interventions and Projecting the Effects of Defunding on Mortality up to 2030: A Retrospective Impact Evaluation and Forecasting Analysis," *The Lancet* 406, no. 10500 (2025): [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(25\)01186-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(25)01186-9).
3. J. Stephen Morrison and Lawrence Gostin, "Promise and Gaps in America First Strategy for Global Health," *BMJ* 391 (2025): <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.r2088>.



## AI Ethics in Catholic Health



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