

MINISTERS OF THE SPIRIT

Since the start of his papacy, Pope Francis has challenged the Church to go beyond the walls of its cathedrals into the streets of our communities, encountering those who are in need. Francis believes that the Holy Spirit urges us toward this outward movement. The Pope's belief — grounded through pneumatology (the study of the Holy Spirit) — can be summed up by his own words as “To put it simply: the Holy Spirit bothers us. Because he moves us, he makes us walk, he pushes the Church to go forward.”¹ This urging of the Spirit is not new to our faith, nor is Francis the first to acknowledge it.



**NATHANIEL
BLANTON
HIBNER**

As a ministry of the Church, one that meets people beyond the walls of a sanctuary, Catholic health care, too, is pushed forward by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit ought to bother us sometimes, as Francis wrote — bother us to respond to new needs in our community, to break free of traditional practices and grow into a ministry for the 21st century. As a way to guide the work

we're called to, it's helpful to ask: In what ways does the Spirit urge us today?

SPirit MOVES US TO STRIVE FOR KINGDOM OF GOD

In the first half of the 20th century, a French Dominican friar named Yves Congar wrote extensively on the role of the Spirit in the development of the Church. In 1960, Pope John XXIII asked Congar to attend the preparatory theological commission for the upcoming Second Vatican Council. He acted as an expert for many in attendance and influenced the great texts published by the Council, such as *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World).

Congar wrote frequently on how Church doctrine develops and the Spirit's role in its history. He insisted that the Spirit's mission is to guide the Church community toward its fulfillment in Christ. It does so not merely as a gentle leader, but also one of inspiration and fire. Congar's pneumatology, much

like Pope Francis' today, reveals a teleological approach to the life of the Church — the idea that the Church is on a road toward some end. Congar also puts forth a belief in the need for the Church to expand, re-invigorate, assess and confirm the traditional teachings of the magisterium, the teaching authority of the Catholic Church. To understand Congar's position simply, we only need to read 2 Corinthians: 3:6, where Paul stressed that Christians are “ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit.”

Congar believed that since the Church is still building, the Holy Spirit can be seen as the project manager, helping the faith community to bring about the vision of God. In his treatise on the Spirit titled *I Believe In the Holy Spirit*, Congar outlines the ways in which the Spirit guides the construction of the Church.

First, one cannot see the Spirit as a harsh motivator. The Spirit does not use coercion as a means to motivate certain behavior, and “does not bring

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about unity by using pressure or by reducing the whole of the Church's life to a uniform pattern.”²

Second, the Spirit moves the Church not only as a whole, but also the individual members of

the body. When writing about charisms given by the Spirit, Congar defines them as “the talents of which the Holy Spirit makes *use pros to sumpheron* (for the common good) so that the community of the Church will be built up.”³ The gifts are aimed for the mission of the Spirit. Our ministry receives these abilities in order that we may work together to build up the Church and to promote the common good. The Spirit sees our facilities and our people as ministers of the Church. In what ways are we living up to that calling?

Next, the Spirit acts as a helping hand, guiding the Church to recognize and profess the Truth of God. The Spirit, “helps the Church, so that, when it is called on to confess, affirm and define that faith, it can do so in a confident ... way.”⁴ In much the same way, our organizations confess our Catholicity with the charism passed down by our founding congregations. The Spirit empowered those religious women and men, and the Spirit empowers us all today.

THE SPIRIT’S ROLE IN GUIDING CHANGE TODAY

However, there are times when the Spirit must act in a more concrete, assertive way. It is easy for the Church and the faithful to find comfort in the known and familiar, however the Spirit must move us toward the truth even when it might be difficult. We see this assertive calling in the communities of Minneapolis, Louisville, Ferguson and so many others who raise the banner for social justice. The Spirit is in those cries, and our ministry acknowledges its role through the We Are Called pledge, a commitment to change ourselves in order to change those communities in need by addressing racism and the systemic causes of health disparities.⁵

Congar concludes his outline by considering that the Spirit “encourages great initiatives to renew the Church, missions, the emergence of new religious orders, great works of the mind and heart. He inspires necessary reforms and prevents them from becoming merely external arrangements”⁶ For health care, the Spirit has called us once again to adapt to change so that we can address the needs of the current health crisis. It

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The Church is a body, and one could state that its soul is the Holy Spirit. To keep the Church from fulfilling the needs of the world would fail to witness the presence of the Spirit in its history. The Spirit also moves our ministry of health care. Like the broader community, the health ministry is building ever toward its completion in the Kingdom of God. As Congar notes, to fulfill this work, our cooperation with the Spirit is essential and ongoing. Through resilience, self-reflection, and, most importantly, humility, we can continue to carry out our commitment to “lead to a new life according to the spirit of Jesus.”⁷

NATHANIEL BLANTON HIBNER, PhD, is director, ethics, for the Catholic Health Association, St. Louis.

NOTES

1. Pope Francis. *Encountering Truth: Meeting God in the Everyday* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2015).
2. Yves Congar, *I Believe In the Holy Spirit: The Complete Three Volume Work in One Volume* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1997).
3. Congar, *I Believe In the Holy Spirit*.
4. Congar, *I Believe*.
5. “We Are Called,” Catholic Health Association, <https://www.chausa.org/cha-we-are-called/>.
6. Congar, *I Believe*.
7. Congar, *I Believe*.

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