

# THE INTERNATIONAL GOOD SAMARITAN

**T**he synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) are so named because they “see alike.” They tell the same stories, but with slight differences. Despite these variations, they reveal lessons that parallel the Catholic health care ministry’s response to needs in our communities, both nationally and globally. In our response to strive for the common good, what can we draw from Scripture to not only bring forth a compassionate response, but an effective one as well?



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For example, let’s look to the story about Jesus speaking to a very large crowd, and feeding them, early in his ministry. St. Matthew represents this as the “Sermon on the Mount,” while St. Luke writes about the “Sermon on the Plain.” Both shaped their telling of this event with broader themes. St. Matthew wrote to the Jews, while St. Luke wrote to the Gentiles, those who

were not Jewish.

In Matthew’s Gospel, the “Sermon on the Mount” evoked themes from the Torah, the Jewish scriptures. The likeliest image that influenced him was another mountain, Mount Sinai, where Moses received the Ten Commandments. Jesus, like Moses, speaks from an elevated position. Part of this story is the Beatitudes — lessons to be learned for the listeners of the story. What does Matthew teach? His lessons are spiritual: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted.” (Matthew 5:3-4)

Luke has a different view. In his Gospel, Jesus speaks to the dispossessed, those at the margins of Roman society. Jesus is “on the Plain,” at the same level as his listeners. “Blessed are you who are poor, for the kingdom of God is yours. Blessed are you who are now hungry, for you will be satisfied.” (Luke 6:20-21) He addresses

the immediate needs of his listeners. Notice also the difference between Matthew’s version and Luke’s in terms of who is addressed. Matthew has Jesus speaking about a group of people who may or may not be present. Luke’s version describes Jesus as speaking directly to those who are present: “You will be satisfied.”

One of the enduring images for Catholic health care has been the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is only found in Luke’s Gospel. So, its interpretation should be through his emphasis on the poor — those who need immediate assistance to sustain themselves. For the Catholic health care ministry, what are the lessons we can learn from this story?

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For this reflection, let’s look at actions. In answering the question, “Who is my neighbor?” by a scholar of the law, Jesus sets the scene like this: “A man fell victim to robbers as he went down from Jerusalem to Jericho. They stripped and beat him and went off leaving him half-dead.” (Luke 10:29-30)

He then describes a priest and a Levite who neglect to act. The next person to encounter the robbery victim is a Samaritan, who offers compassionate and effective care to the wounded man, despite facing personal risk on a dangerous road. The empathic response of someone who would have been reviled in the Jewish community is deliberate in this parable.

To have a Samaritan in Luke's Gospel as the one who acts ethically, when those who were faithful to the law did not act morally, points to a dissonance in the interpretation of how we should act. The conclusion of the parable in Luke 10 is that the person who treats another with mercy is the most faithful person. Actions, not identities, are the determining measures.

So, Scripture, and its lessons, are paired with our desire to respond to the many human needs that we see internationally. In the face of these needs, how should we act? In crisis, those afflicted will often reach out to others to alleviate their suffering. It is natural to empathize with those calls to help. How can we be the Good Samaritan in our international activities, both individually and as Catholic organizations? How can we offer compassionate, and still effective, care? The answer is found in prudence, authenticity, honesty, patience, excellence and humility, six principles for action that CHA highlights in its *Guiding Principles for Conducting Global Health Activities*.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Prudence**

Prudence requires that action is directed toward accomplishing what is good. Action without assessment, planning and then evaluation may result in not only being ineffective in achieving the good that we intend, but perhaps creating a worse situation than when we first acted. Our efforts should be thoughtful in order to have the ability to do well.

#### **Authenticity**

Authenticity means that the work that we do involves a partnership with those whom we serve. To give without an invitation presumes knowing what assistance is needed, and how to best accomplish our goals. Instead, we should be listeners and understand what motivations and purposes the local partner has. The Catholic social teaching of both solidarity and subsidiarity are necessary.

We should share the work, and we should favor local influence of any international project. In the words of Pope Paul VI, we need to grow in a solidarity which would allow "all peoples to become the artisans of their destiny," since every person is called to self-fulfillment.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Honesty**

Honesty is about trust and communication. Do both partners agree on common goals while also having the same perceptions of potential risks? This level of dialogue requires an understanding of culture, and how what is and is not communicated contributes to the success of project outcomes.

#### **Patience**

Patience is the capacity to think about the future. While natural disasters and human conflicts set up "emergency situations," success in changing those circumstances are often long-term goals. International partnerships should foster capacity, not dependency. Those who have the ability to give resources may fall into the false promises of technology as solutions to human problems. Life, as it is lived by those who we seek to assist, is the measure of success.

#### **Excellence**

Excellence means to adopt a standard of quality work. Doing something that is ineffective and not thoughtful is often worse than doing something limited and of quality. We should never adopt standards that are less than what we ourselves would want. For example, dispensing out-of-date medications or allowing untrained and unlicensed personnel to perform medical procedures would never be permitted in the United States, and neither should it be done in other nations.

#### **Humility**

Humility, our concluding principle, requires cultural competence and the ability to respect our partners. A true collaboration means that there is mutual learning. Both the planning and evaluation of successful partnerships have space for considering how our own experiences shape the ways in which we presume to know how to best accomplish our goals.

## CONCLUSION

To be a Good Samaritan in the international community means to act compassionately. Individual acts of mercy must be understood in terms of a communal vocation to be benevolent persons for others. As Pope Francis wrote: “We were put in this world to love him (God) and our neighbors. Everything else passes away, only this remains. ... (tragedy) summons us to take seriously the things that are serious, and not to be caught up in those that matter less; to rediscover that life is of no use if not used to serve others. For life is measured by love.”<sup>3</sup>

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## NOTES

1. *Guiding Principles for Conducting Global Health Activities* (St. Louis: Catholic Health Association, 2022): [https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/international-outreach/cha\\_guidingprinciples\\_2022-update\\_lr\\_single.pdf?sfvrsn=7370c7f2\\_3](https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/international-outreach/cha_guidingprinciples_2022-update_lr_single.pdf?sfvrsn=7370c7f2_3).
2. Pope Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, paragraph 65, [https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum.html).
3. Pope Francis, “Homily of His Holiness Pope Francis,” April 5, 2020, [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20200405\\_omelia-palme.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20200405_omelia-palme.html).

# Upcoming Events

from The Catholic Health Association

## Long-Term Care Networking Zoom Gathering

July 12 | 3 – 4 p.m. ET

*Members Only*

## United Against Human Trafficking Networking Zoom Call

July 14 | Noon ET

## Faith Community Nurse Networking Zoom Call

July 20 | 1 – 2 p.m. ET

## Deans of Catholic Colleges of Nursing Networking Zoom Call

July 26 | Noon–1 p.m. ET

## Global Health Networking Zoom Call

Aug. 3 | Noon ET

## Long-Term Care Networking Zoom Gathering

Oct. 11 | 3 – 4 p.m. ET

*Members Only*

## Webinar: Community Benefit 101

Oct. 25 – 27 | 2 – 5 p.m. ET

## Diversity & Disparities Networking Zoom Call

Oct. 25 | 1 – 2 p.m. ET

## Global Health Networking Zoom Call

Nov. 2 | Noon ET



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