

Celebrating the Legacy Of a Mission

BY SR. BARBARA McMULLEN, CDP

In 1995, Holy Family Hospital, in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, Canada, began the process of closing its doors. Holy Family Hospital, operated by the Sisters of Charity of the Immaculate Conception, had been tending the sick for 87 years, and was a large employer in the area. Its roots ran deep in the community.

In September 1997, Sr. McMullen spoke to hospital employees, provincial and civic leaders, and community religious figures at a banquet marking the culmination of the long and difficult process.



Sr. McMullen is senior associate, Sponsor Services, Catholic Health Association, St. Louis.

Thinking about your journey of letting go, grieving, and moving on sparked within me two images of movement: doorways and dancing.

Doorways are of great importance in our lives. Without them we remain stranded, unable to leave where we are. We cannot pass into the next room, enter a different building, or begin a new period in our life. They mark beginnings and endings, entries and exits from our lives. We greet people in doorways, wave goodbye from them, carry loved ones through them, place holy water receptacles in them, and hang mistletoe over them. In fact, our earthly existence can perhaps best be understood as a journey marked by various doors. Some are open, others are closed—all are grace-filled opportunities from God to grow.

For the community of Holy Family Hospital and the community of Prince Albert, there are a variety of doorways calling, both personally and communally.

THE DOORWAY OF VISION

"Visions are pictures of what is not yet but what could be, with a little work. They are pieces of hope dropped into an otherwise daily life. Visions incite passion and the willingness to work for their accomplishment. Visions are possibilities. They're also beyond the seer and larger than the heart's ease. They make us uncomfortable and draw us beyond ourselves and our self-imposed

limitations. To have a vision is not enough. One must also work to make that vision happen."¹ That is what the Sisters of Charity did at Holy Family Hospital some 87 years ago. They had a dream and moved it into a vision. It captured the hearts of others who also believed in that vision. Over the years all those who worked at Holy Family Hospital helped to clarify that vision.

Clear vision puts creativity into life and finds creative solutions. It reframes the *problem* as an *opportunity*. The task is difficult and requires knowledge and steadfastness. Even though Canadian healthcare is changing dramatically, the voice of Catholics and other Christians in healthcare issues need not disappear along with their hospitals. You are being called to go through the *doorway of vision*, because, as Christians, you don't have a choice *but* to be involved in healthcare, in imitation of Jesus' healing ministry. This doorway calls you to celebrate and to grieve, to take time as a community to say you have lost something that can never be replaced, and then to move on with your lives. Over the past few years you have done just that. Now you must find new ways of healing in the community, new ways of influencing the values and ethics in other organizational structures.

THE DOORWAY OF DIVERSITY

We live in a world that demands of us the ability to shift and struggle with all the implications change brings, a world that brings together many people's perspectives to take us beyond our own confines, be they geographical, philosophical, or religious. Our horizons are enlarged as we test and try alternatives for what may bring us truth, cause us to change our minds, learn something new, understand better, and grow beyond stagnation to generativity. We need the *doorway of diversity* to help us see and believe that there is more than one right answer. Although the closure of Holy Family Hospital has not been without times of internal and external strife, it has also included times of acceptance, hope, and challenge. The diversity of gifts represented in the sis-

Continued on page 103

FINAL SAY

Continued from page 104

ters, the leaders, the employees, and the friends of Holy Family Hospital will not be lost. As Sr. Kathleen Mary* has said, "Like salt that disappears into the soup it flavors, Catholics involved in health-care will not disappear after the hospital's closure. You are called to flavor this district with the good news that every human being is precious, and that healing is done not only in this hospital but all over the place. Jesus is calling you to be salt and to continue to make a difference in this community."

THE DOORWAY OF PASSION

Passion is that profound innermost feeling of conviction that drives us to let God do in us all that is needed. It is the boundless enthusiasm that marches us forward to contribute our unique piece to the larger design being woven in diversity with a clarity of vision. This passion makes our lives a celebration of beauty that challenges us to move beyond where we are to where we could be. It was this passion that led the Sisters of Charity to build a hospital when they were called upon for help. The doorway of passion is now also your call to celebrate the grace to see, the fire to burn, and the energy to transform.

THE DOORWAY OF HOPE

God's presence can be felt when people remember the blessings of their past and thus find reason to trust in a future. "Hope is a strange thing. It often seems absurd, and yet it stubbornly persists. It appears in unlikely places."² It moves us beyond the fear of the present with its challenges to accept a future full of possibilities. It demands that we see the new questions as God's call to grow.

The early Christian communities, much like you, experienced themselves as a people called by a God who had redeemed them. They believed that their future would be the one God had promised. Because of this they acted with courage, even in the face of trials and difficulties. But they were not naive in their hope. They did not expect that all their troubles would disappear, all their pain cease. The same may be true for you. But the reality of Christian hope rests in resurrection. "In the midst of desolation, life triumphs."³ Now fidelity to the mission is your task.

THE DOORWAY OF MISSION

Simply put, mission means being sent as Jesus was sent to be a presence of radical healing in the world on behalf of the kingdom of God.

Though you may not minister at Holy Family Hospital any longer, you are still sent to bring a

*Though you
may not
minister at
Holy Family
Hospital any
longer, you
are still sent
to bring a
healing that
addresses the
brokenness of
the human
condition.*

healing that addresses the brokenness of the human condition. You, like Jesus, will also seek to heal those things which divide the human community in order to create the conditions necessary for true health for all persons. As Sr. Jean deBlois says, "MISSION is the imperative for all Christians and brings with it certain attitudes and behaviors. No matter where you minister, you are called to reach out to all persons in need, regardless of who they are. MISSION requires you to be immersed in the world of today as Jesus was immersed in his, to see the world as a place of grace, even though much healing remains to be done before the kingdom can break forth in its fullness. MISSION calls you to be prophetic wherever you minister; to call all persons and institutions to fidelity, to those things which the kingdom of God requires."⁴

These doorways take you beyond the structures and buildings of Catholic healthcare and help "you position yourselves in such a way that you can effectively transform your current reality on behalf of God's kingdom."⁵

THE DANCING

And finally, the dancing. The dancing is integral to it all—it is the meeting place of everything in the doorways, for the dance is life itself. We are the dance—creatures made of energy and motion who can hear the rhythm, embrace the beat, be attuned to the harmony that happens precisely because of the differences.

I invite you to accept the invitation to be the dance. "If you do, you might experience some of the varied feelings of anyone asked to dance: hesitancy, self-consciousness, fear of doing it wrong, concern about 'looking good,' or great joy at being asked because you have long wanted to dance."⁶ The dance requires a certain amount of letting go, of not being afraid to make mistakes, a willingness to lead and to follow. It can be visionary, diverse, passionate, and hopeful as the beat of life unfolds and is connected to the day-to-day experiences of beauty, truth and goodness.

Now it is your turn to dance—to carry the sisters' legacy of caring and leadership in healthcare into the future. □

NOTES

1. Juliana Casey, *Food for the Journey*, Catholic Health Association, St. Louis, 1991.
2. Casey, p. 64.
3. Casey, p. 65.
4. Jean deBlois, "The MISSION Imperative: Our Foundation and Market Imperative," *Health Progress*, Mar-Apr 1997, pp. 24-27.
5. DeBlois.
6. Joyce Rupp, *May I Have This Dance?* Ave Maria Press, Notre Dame, IN, 1992, p. 13.

*Sr. Kathleen Mary McCarthy, CSJ, assistant administrator, Mission/Community Relations, Our Lady of Lourdes Health Center, Pasco, WA