

Finding the Center

BY SR. MARY ROCH ROCKLAGE, RSM

When the Sisters of Mercy Regional Community of St. Louis formed the Sisters of Mercy Health System 11 years ago, both business and ministry were driving forces in our decision. To be strong, vibrant, effective stewards—to carry on Jesus' healing mission—we had to recognize, own, and be equally whole in both ministry and business.

Card. Joseph Bernardin addressed this issue well. In a presentation at Fordham University in 1992, he stated: "Catholic colleges and universities, health care institutions, and social service agencies already live with one foot firmly planted in the Catholic Church and the other in our pluralistic society. . . . Indeed, the mixed model of identity should help us minister more effectively in the world."

We are not solely in ministry, nor are we solely in business. These have to be brought together and become one. Although they seem to be opposites, Charles Johnson, in his book *Necessary Wisdom*,¹ suggests looking at things in new ways. He says: "Universally, new ideas take things that before seemed separate, even opposite, and invite us to think in terms of some large, more dynamic whole." This is our task, because we have to find a way to bridge the distance between ministry and business.

Johnson points out that in order to do so, we must not do three things:

- We cannot say business and ministry are separate and cannot come together.
- We cannot pretend they are not different, and try to merge them into one.
- We cannot compromise and find a lowest common denominator in an effort to make everyone happy.

Ministry and business are really two aspects of the same entity, which draws them into a relationship. The challenge is to enter the center that holds ministry and business in appropriate interdependence, to bring the strength and power of good business practices and of ministry together and thus create something new for the sake of



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Jesus' mission. In the center, we will find the energy and the creativity to hold ministry and business in healthy tension. We must do this to move forward in the ministry.

If business and ministry are not in tension, one of two things has happened:

- We have forgotten the ministry and are solely business; then we are not who we are.
- We have ignored sound business practices to do solely ministry. But the only way our ministry can be done is through business—so we would not exist.

We must struggle day in and day out to maintain a dual identity. If we do not do this, we will not be able to address our enduring concerns: to aid the poor, the sick, the uneducated; to relieve misery; and to address its causes.

A NEW CREATION

At Sisters of Mercy Health System, as we look back over the years since we were formed, we think we would receive a passing grade. But we must never rest on our laurels. We must continue to challenge ourselves.

We should continue to be grateful for our stewardship, and continue to be faithful. We must strive for fidelity to the reasons we formed the system and to be wise stewards. But the struggle is not only to remain just, but to be people of peace.

THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Peace is not just a state of equanimity and a lack of unease. In *Necessary Wisdom*, Johnson defines peace as a commitment to resolving conflicts. There is no permanent state of equanimity; instead we must commit ourselves to resolving conflict, both internal and external.

The bishops' economic pastoral says it another way: "The quest for economic and social justice will always combine hope and realism, and must be renewed by every generation. It involves diagnosing those situations that continue to alienate

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Care is a major asset. Unlike so much literature in gerontology, the book is clear, straightforward, and well focused on practical issues, while maintaining a high standard of scholarship throughout. Both academics and service professionals will find it extremely useful. My single stylistic quibble involves the index, which should include more entries, especially geographic names.

The content is excellent but necessarily has its shortcomings, given the broad subject matter. Although the book provides essential background on the history, economics, and politics of long-term care, a wider perspective is needed. Anyone seriously dedicated to reforming long-term care must understand the relevance of the far-reaching, persistent problems in American society, of which the book's focus is but one small expression.

For example, the reader is left wondering how the long-term care industry will manage to provide better trained personnel (one of the book's recommendations) when underpaid nursing aides, often from urban ghettos, now perform most of the work. The observation that "tomorrow's elderly will be wealthier" ignores the increasing gap between rich and poor people and the current trend to exclude certain populations from services. It would be more correct to say that "a few of tomorrow's elderly will be enormously wealthy; the sicker majority will be as poor as ever." Many references are made to community-based and home-based care, but none to the problems of crime and environmental degradation, which are among the most serious obstacles to these solutions.

We hope that long-term care, along with many other societal obligations, can be improved without a total overhaul of the society. The broader conditions just mentioned would seem to limit the options, however, and could be an appropriate subject of a supplemental book.

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MEDIA CAMPAIGNS

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The communications programs position California to give babies the best possible start in life.

Every major branch of the California Department of Health Services participated on the Blocks for Life team, as well as the California Healthcare Association, the California Medical Association, and the California Association of Health Plans. The Blocks for Life materials include posters, magnets, t-shirts, immunization innovation awards, and a parent's promise certificate, to be given to new parents while their baby is still in the hospital. Materials are produced in both English and Spanish, to reach nearly 90 percent of the state's parents of infants. A popular television PSA was also done in both languages.

The immunization campaign was formally launched in April 1997 at Long Beach Memorial Medical Center. Guests of honor were the Shier quintuplets, who were born in early 1996 at Long Beach Memorial and who were about to receive their 15-month inoculations.

Community organizations and county health departments throughout the state were eager to add Blocks of Life items to their immunization materials. In the months since April, thousands of pieces with the new logo have been distributed to hospitals, doctors' offices, and clinics. People from more than 30 other states are interested in adapting the campaign for their areas.

The BabyCal and Blocks of Life communications programs position California to give babies and infants the best possible start in life. □

FINAL SAY

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Joy comes from our belief that God is faithful.

the world from God's creative love."²
 This is what we are trying to do in our faith institution, so that God's creative love will present hopeful alternatives.

To create something new, we have to constantly live in the center, in that healthy tension between hope and realism, ministry and business. This quest for a new creation arises from faith and is sustained by hope. Hope is not naive optimism, but rather the conviction that God is at work in the world. Through this hope we speak to a broken world of God's justice, and God's kindness.

Being faithful to that vision of hope in our discordant society requires us to have courage. That courage comes from a conviction that everything is going to go well. We have a deep faith that God is with us, and an interior joy that comes from knowing we are not, ultimately, responsible. We are not the Messiah. We are ministers.

Joy also comes from our belief that God is faithful, and that our struggle to follow Christ—not our success—is what will bring God's reign of love to the world. We rejoice in the invitation to join in the struggle—to seek justice, to be compassionate, and to reflect mercy, which God gives unconditionally to the world. □

NOTES

1. Charles M. Johnston, *Necessary Wisdom: Meeting the Challenge of a New Cultural Maturity*, ICD Press, Seattle, 1991.
2. National Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Economic Justice for All," U.S. Catholic Conference, Washington, DC, 1986.