

Gifts, Grace And Sr. Patricia Talone

By SR. RENEE YANN, RSM, DMin

In August 2016, Sr. Patricia Talone, RSM, PhD, will retire after 15 years of service with the Catholic Health Association. In her announcement of Sr. Talone's impending departure from CHA, Sr. Carol Keehan, DC, president and CEO, wrote: "There is no way to exaggerate the contributions Sr. Patricia has made in her 15 years here. In addition to being an accomplished moral theologian, she is an incredibly gifted teacher. So many CHA educational programs have benefitted from her talent and commitment. The reviews of her teaching are consistently over the top.

"The number of consults she has done for members on ethical issues, mission and sponsorship cannot be counted. She also has assisted Catholic health ministries internationally. Sr. Pat's presence to each of us is an exceptional gift. No cause, concern or need is too small or too large for her to try to help with. Her efforts to create community and a mission culture have made such a difference in all our work lives."

Sr. Talone's impact on the Catholic health care ministry, while immeasurable, is reflected in the impressive table of her accomplishments and the sincere accolades of her colleagues. As a Sister of Mercy for nearly 60 years, Sr. Talone has led a life deeply infused with the charism of Catherine McAuley, which calls the church to a practical love for the poor, sick and uneducated. For Sr. Talone, that practical love evolved into a passion for ethics as the conduit for true Christian charity.

The quintessential educator, Sr. Talone's teaching career spans the entire scholastic range. She tells the story of a parish where she served as a young sister. Some altar boys robbed the collection basket. The priest counseled her to "understand human nature and the reality before you," and gave the boys "the privilege of making restitution." He asked her not to say anything to them, because "they need to believe in your good opin-

ion of them." Such unflinching respect for the person, and faith in their desire to do good, underlie all Sr. Talone's interactions. These elements offer a simple, yet profound, definition of her ethical motivations.

"Sr. Pat frequently reminds audiences that she has taught every level from elementary school to post-graduate education," says Lynette Ballard, senior director of education at CHA. "She teaches with great enthusiasm. Her style depends on solid research, careful construction of arguments, precise use of language and explanatory narratives. Nearly every story will produce laugh-

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ter, and most of them will elicit tears —often Sr. Pat’s own.”

Ron Hamel, PhD, retired senior director of ethics at CHA, describes Sr. Talone as a devoted and gifted teacher: “Clarity in thought and communication, humor, storytelling and a knack for connecting to people’s experience coalesce to make her teaching effective, enjoyable and memorable. The same qualities have made her an outstanding ethicist.”

This ability to humanize scholarship marks Sr. Talone’s teaching as uniquely accessible for her many grateful audiences. Through innumerable presentations, lectures and webinars, she has shared with thousands her intense devotion to the health care ministry. As both teacher and mentor, she has kindled the same love in countless hearts. Jenna Herron, vice president for mission integration at Topeka, Kansas-based St. Francis Health, describes this gift: “I first encountered Sr. Pat as a student preparing to enter the exciting world of mission and ethics. I was instantly enveloped in her passion to mentor as she shared her experience, wisdom and joy around the work of Catholic health care. Sr. Pat ignites young leaders and prepares them to think through the lens of compassion and dignity.”

Mentorship is fundamental to Sr. Talone’s ministerial life. The guidance she offers is deeply rooted in her love for the church, for its grace-filled traditions and its legacy of mercy, charity and social justice. As a formation minister, she enriched her inclination toward ethics with expertise in counseling and spirituality. As director of temporary professed, and then of the vocations program for the Sisters of Mercy, Sr. Talone began the earnest practice of this significant gift.

Her ministry with CHA has provided her with a wide arena.

Dougal Hewitt, chief officer for mission and external affairs at Presence Health of Chicago, comments, “I thought of myself as one of

the young leaders inspired by Sr. Pat and led towards mission, but I never realized how many of us were part of the legion of leaders Sr. Pat has nurtured over the years. I was drawn at first to Pat’s intellect, humor and deep spirituality. Eventually, I have come to see that Pat has, through the force of her extraordinary personality, shaped the future of Catholic health care. She has become a leader of Christ’s healing ministry and has an incredible talent to identify, challenge and draw out the talents and gifts of those who can

sustain Catholic health care for the future.”

Sr. Talone’s considerable personal gifts and impressive academic achievements found a perfect setting in the CHA community. There, in a milieu in which giftedness is fulfilled by service, Sr. Talone has labored among friends for the blessing and welfare of thousands. Her ability to marry precise discipline with creative compassion opens the door to otherwise inaccessible solutions.

Michael Rodgers, senior vice president, policy and advocacy at CHA, says this: “Sr. Pat’s contribution to the ministry will be sorely missed. As we have had to consider challenging policy decisions related to the Catholic health ministry, Sr. Patricia has been a beacon of enlightened thought. Her reflections on the importance of mission and the interaction of health care ethics on public policy have helped strengthen CHA’s advocacy at the national level. Happily, the impact on the people



Sr. Patricia Talone, RSM, in Rome, 2016.

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we serve has always been at the forefront of her deliberations.”

Ellen Schlanker, a communications director at CHA, confirms Rodgers’ assessment. “Sr. Pat has had a profound influence on the mission of CHA and its service to the ministry. She has an extraordinary gift for analyzing complex moral and ethical issues and explaining them in ways others can understand. She created a strong foundation for CHA’s mission department, which will continue to grow and flourish.”

Regina Clifton, former vice president, mission, at CHA, offers insight to the heart of Sr. Talone’s ministry. “While I have known Pat for many years, as ethicist, manager and friend, her most impressive gift, in my estimation, is her skill as an ethicist when relating with families in crisis. I have personally seen, and at other times been told, how she can bring a family torn apart by a crucial decision regarding a loved one to a decision that united the family in peace and love. These actions show a wonderful combination of Pat’s gifts and talents as person, ethicist, religious, and her warm and loving personality.”

Indeed, Sr. Talone’s personality may be her overarching blessing. It is the vibrant river that carries the rest of her treasure straight to the hearts of those she encounters. Jeff Tieman, formerly CHA’s chief of staff, places her “among the smartest, sharpest people I have ever known, often using words that force me back to the dictionary. Sr. Pat is the consummate storyteller who shares her anecdotes with flair and a moral at the end.”

Adele Gianino, director of meetings and travel at CHA, calls Sr. Talone “a classic.” “Her laugh — it’s Philadelphia — it’s loud — it’s real — and I wish someone in our office would record it, because we are going to miss it.”

Gianino continues, “Sr. Pat has great instinct. She knows, just by how someone walks down the corridor at CHA, if you have a concern. And she would call you into her office. Sister has a great capacity to love you through anything.”

Sr. Talone has been colleague, supervisor and friend to Ed Giganti, senior vice president, marketing and communications. He notes, “Those of us traveling with Pat see her care and concern for people others might never engage: cab drivers, maids, cashiers. She sincerely cares about their histories, families and aspirations. She advises them, and when able, uses her networks to foster their dreams. I guess that makes her a great tipper.”

It is this capacity to love that causes Sr. Talone to shine. When she was a very young religious, she passed each day through a Gothic doorway at the motherhouse into the postulants’ classroom. Over the door, these words were inscribed in a majestic illumination: “Those who instruct others to justice will shine like stars for all eternity.” (Daniel 12:3). That 18-year-old girl never dreamed how her love for justice, her passion for learning and her enthusiasm for life would combine to help light the way for an entire community and ministry.

Commenting on her time with CHA, Sr. Talone reflects, “Karl Rahner once said that life gathers into fullness. I have experienced that truth at CHA. I have been blessed with a deeper appreciation of what it means to serve at the heart of our church and been profoundly heartened as we worked with bishops, theologians and leaders to bring faith and integrity to our communal discernment.”

In a 2009 article celebrating the life passage of her friend Dr. Mary Christine Reyelt, SC, Sr. Talone said, “Not all of us are called to be martyrs, but each one of us is called to give our lives for others.”

As she closes the chapter on her service with the CHA, Sr. Patricia Talone can feel very blessed to have had the grace to answer that call.

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