



HOSPITAL WORKERS DISCUSS CATHOLIC VALUES

At Timken Mercy Medical Center, a 476-bed hospital in Canton, OH, Catholic identity had long been taken for granted. But feedback from hospital employees indicated that many did not have a strong understanding of the philosophy of Catholic healthcare and how it makes Timken Mercy different from a non-Catholic hospital. The need for staff education about the hospital's philosophy and mission was apparent. After much consideration, administrators decided to hold a series of "dialogue sessions" in which they would discuss philosophy and mission of the medical center with employees to gauge their understanding and provide further education.

IN THE BEGINNING

Because philosophy and mission are vital components of our work lives, Timken Mercy administrators thought that employees should have the opportunity to engage in a dialogue with management staff and me, the administrative assistant for the hospital's Philosophy and Mission Committee, about the special nature of work in a Catholic healthcare facility. When employees first learned about the dialogue sessions, they were dubious about the process. Some decided not to attend. But as news about the sessions spread, those who had been "too busy" began to "find time" to participate.

The first phase of the process, begun in

Philosophy Is The Focus in A Series of Dialogue Sessions

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October 1992, was limited to the management staff. Eleven sessions were planned, with the managers choosing the one that best fit their schedules. To stress the importance of the dialogue sessions, each group was led by a member of Timken Mercy's executive team and me. A member of the hospital's Philosophy and Mission Committee took notes of comments made.

A task force of employees had previously developed Timken Mercy's official statement of philosophy. In each dialogue session, the discussion leader presented the group with three ideas taken from the philosophy statement:

- "To meet the needs of the times by an

Summary Feedback from staff at Timken Mercy Medical Center in Canton, OH, suggested that they were taking the facility's Catholic identity for granted. Employees did not have a strong understanding of Catholic healthcare philosophy and how it made Timken Mercy different from non-Catholic hospitals. The hospital's administrators sought a solution to this problem.

In fall 1992 the hospital began to hold a series of "dialogue sessions" for its staff members on Timken Mercy's philosophy. The first sessions, for managers, were so successful that meetings were added for other hospital workers early the following year.

After an opening prayer, the participants in each session discussed points taken from Timken Mercy's statement of philosophy. After the sessions, participants suggested ways the hospital's philosophy might better be embodied in their work lives.

Employee morale has improved as a result of the hospital-wide discussion of Catholic healthcare values. A new openness and willingness to grow has been noted in Timken Mercy's staff.



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expression of Christian concern for the sick, suffering, and dying. . .”

- “Manifesting love, truth, and justice for the people we serve and with whom we work”

- “To promote the advancement and application of new knowledge which will promote health”

The discussion centered around these three phrases. In addition, the leader described the history of the medical center’s sponsor, the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine; defined the word “charity”; and read a discussion of “affirmation” from the book *Born Only Once: The Miracle of Affirmation*, by Conrad W. Baars (Franciscan Herald Press, Chicago, 1975). Participants also reviewed the hospital’s “Expectations of Management Personnel” statement and shared ideas on how some of these concepts might be incorporated into the routine management of each hospital department.

Questions raised in the sessions included: What does it mean to work in a Catholic healthcare facility? How does it differ from a non-Catholic hospital? Does it matter to you that you work in a Christian hospital, or is it just a job? How can we remember to show love and affirmation to others? How do we practice justice for the people we serve and with whom we work?

After the dialogue session, each participant was given a questionnaire that asked: Do you understand Timken Mercy’s values? Do you think the values make a difference? Do you think Timken Mercy exhibits these values? Do you think Timken Mercy’s religious values make a difference to the public? Participants then answered two further questions: What types of actions *are* being taken to reinforce values? and What types of actions *could* be taken to reinforce values? Participants were asked to answer these at their leisure and then return them to me.

Next, the questionnaire results were typed up,

as were the comments recorded during the dialogue sessions; these were shared with the management staff. The executive team addressed various concerns and complaints the managers had voiced. Management staff members said they were pleased with the sessions and requested that we hold similar sessions for other employees.

PHASE TWO

The remaining hospital employees took part in dialogue sessions in spring 1993. One employee from every department was included in each dialogue group, so that employees could get to know workers from other departments and learn something about their jobs. Sessions were held on all three work shifts to accommodate employees, although they were not required to attend.

In each group a department manager was the dialogue leader; another manager, or an employee volunteer, acted as secretary. All participants were given a copy of the hospital’s philosophy statement and the three ideas to be discussed.

Each meeting began with prayer, followed by a short introduction to the session, usually made by one of the hospital’s vice presidents or me. The sessions lasted no more than an hour, although after most of the sessions, one or two employees stayed to continue the dialogue with the group leader.

Employees were not shy about speaking up during the sessions, however. Some had complaints about what they perceived as low morale, poor communications, a shortage of volunteers, and the fact that managers sometimes break rules they expect their workers to follow. These issues were discussed within the context of Timken Mercy’s philosophy statement. Participants were given a form to fill out at home, asking if there was anything the Philosophy and Mission

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healthcare reform proposals for a business magazine.


The magazine, *Inter-Business Issues*, which has a circulation of 20,000, covers matters affecting the business community in central Illinois. Dave Wright, its publisher, recognized that healthcare reform could have both a personal and a professional impact on his readers. He says: "[Moore] was knowledgeable about the healthcare crisis and passionate about what needed to be done about it. He was not afraid to say what he thought. So when I decided to start a regular column on healthcare reform, it was only natural to choose him."

In his introductory column, Moore provided his readers with an overview of the healthcare crisis, describing its origins and evolution. Subsequent columns examined factors contributing to the crisis, including consumer demand for healthcare, changes in the insurance industry, changes in how government entitlement programs pay healthcare providers for services, and the high costs of malpractice insurance and defensive medicine.

More recently, Moore has written about President Clinton's healthcare reform plan and rival plans proposed by congressional opponents.

Publisher Wright says Moore's column is popular. "With healthcare reform being on the front burner," he says, "the column is something people look forward to reading, whether or not they agree with Jim point by point."

An independent survey of 400 Peoria-area residents was done recently. Of those who said they receive health-related information from a hospital, more than three-fourths named Saint Francis as their source. The Leadership Roundtable and Moore's column have no doubt contributed to this result. □

 For additional information on roundtable meetings, call Chris Lofgren, 309-655-2777; for information about the healthcare column, call Theresa Schieffer, 309-655-2322.

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urveys of our patients reveal satisfaction with the compassionate attitude of Timken Mercy's staff.

Committee could do to better assist them in carrying out our mission. Participants were also given a sticker with the philosophy statement printed on it, to remind them of their experience in the dialogue groups.

At the next quarterly employee meeting—an update on hospital developments held every four months or so—the executive team summarized the dialogue sessions and discussed some of the issues raised in them. Many of the concerns have been addressed, although we are still working on ways to improve communications. Workers said they were pleased to learn that someone was listening to their concerns and trying to resolve them.

PHASE THREE

In fall 1993 we conducted a third series of dialogue sessions. This time we decided to hold a session in each of the hospital's departments, so that employees would have more control over the hours of presentation and could build relationships within the departments themselves. After the first few sessions, staff members asked that managers and supervisors not be present. In most instances I was the group leader.

For the opening prayer at these dialogue sessions we watched a video produced by the hospital. The video, called *Holy Ground* and set to a piece of music of the same name (Thomas Michael Talbot, Sparrow Corporation, Chatsworth, CA, 1986), shows Timken Mercy employees performing various duties. It is very popular with staff members; it helps them "put things in perspective," some have said.


As a basis for the discussion, participants were given cards bearing Timken

Mercy's five values, which are an extension of the philosophy and mission statements. Later, after the dialogue sessions, each department selected a value it would focus on during the coming year. For example, the Intensive Care Unit pledged to focus on charity by treating others with respect and kindness and strengthening their functioning as a team. Department managers are currently monitoring how closely their staffs approach the chosen values. Success, or lack of it, will be discussed during each employee's annual review.

FUTURE PLANS

The employee meetings ended early this year. At present, we are considering ways to make the dialogue sessions available to the volunteers of the medical center. These sessions will focus on the philosophy statement, employing a format similar to that used by managers during the first round of sessions. Still another series of sessions for volunteers will use Timken Mercy's five values as the basis of discussion.

The fruits of the 1992-93 sessions are already apparent throughout the medical center. Employee morale has significantly improved, according to department managers. When staff members are working on committees or planning programs, they frequently ask themselves: "How does our philosophy apply here?" Best of all, surveys of our patients reveal satisfaction with the quality of care provided by and compassionate attitude of Timken Mercy's staff. □

 For more information about dialogue sessions, contact Sr. Mary Lois Phillip, CSA, 216-489-1000.