



Chad Lubbers

Image of the cross in wood found in lobby of Avera Heart Hospital after the Sept. 10 tornadoes.

# ‘I Am With You’

MARY L. HILL, BSN, MAHCM, JD

**T**he image of a cross in the wood is a visual reminder of God’s enduring promise, “I am with you.” We first encounter the promise in the Book of Genesis when God called Abraham to leave his home, his relatives and his country to venture through foreign lands. In the face of Abraham’s unknown future, God didn’t promise familiarity; rather, God promised *to be with* Abraham, guiding and blessing his journey toward founding the great nation of Israel.

Many centuries later, God restated the promise when He called a reluctant and plainspoken Moses to lead the Israelites from captivity. In response to Moses’ objections, God didn’t promise confidence; rather God promised to be with Moses, speaking through him to a hard-hearted Pharaoh and the wayward people.

God’s promise took on special significance with the coming of Emmanuel, which literally means, “God with us.” Jesus incarnated the promise and showed us how to build God’s Kingdom through acts of love, mercy and service. In the midst of the world’s suffering, Jesus didn’t promise contentment; rather, he was with us, transforming even death through the power of his Resurrection. And, at the conclusion of his earthly ministry, Jesus commended the promise to all generations proclaiming, “I am with you always, until the end of the age.”

We can see God’s enduring promise revealed through the faithfulness of our founding sisters who, inspired by the Gospel ministry of Jesus and his command, “Go and do likewise,” traveled to Dakota Territory to teach, heal and accompany. Although the journey has not been easy, God has been with the sisters as their ministries flourished into Avera, the largest women-founded organization in South Dakota. In the face of the many difficulties experienced throughout Avera’s history — harsh prairie conditions, epidemics, economic hardship, war and severe weather — God has been with Avera, inspiring and enabling it to be Christ’s healing compassion.

Thus, as Avera continues to encounter the inevitable challenges attendant to health care ministry, we rest in the assurance that God is with us always, guiding and empowering us to bring hope and healing to our world.

## **AVERA: WHO WE ARE**

Avera, a Catholic health care ministry rooted in the Gospel, is a response to Jesus’ command, “Go and do likewise.” In accord with its mission, Avera endeavors to positively impact the lives and health of persons and communities by providing quality services guided by Christian values.

As a ministry of the Catholic church, Avera distinguishes itself by service to and advocacy for those persons whose social condition puts them at the margins of society and makes them particularly vulnerable to discrimination. Avera rejoices in the challenge to be Christ’s healing compassion in the world and operates in a way that enables persons served to experience their own dignity and value.

This reflection by **MARY L. HILL**, executive vice president of mission, Avera Health, Sioux Falls, S.D., was written in response to a reporter’s question about Avera’s mission in the aftermath of tornadoes that hit the city on Sept. 10, 2019. An image of the cross was spotted in a piece of wood debris left behind. The reflection has been adapted and reprinted with permission from Avera Health.

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