

## EDITOR'S NOTE

Our hopes for the future of Catholic health care are anchored by the goals of population health, a holistic approach to the continuum of care and the steady progress of health reform. The people of Catholic health care, who can turn those hopes into realities, come from a multitude of professions and vocations. The profession of nursing, which has always been the foundation of the ministry, will be essential to its future. The women and men who tend our illnesses and attend to the details as well as the big picture of health care are the focus of this issue.



MARY ANN  
STEINER

If one gospel speaks more to nurses than the others, it must be Luke's. His account is steeped in the humanity of a very flesh-and-blood Jesus. In Luke we find a Jesus more inclusive of women, more drawn to the poorest of the poor, more open to outsiders like pushy tax collectors and good Samaritans, and more forgiving of prodigal sons, wayward women and other sinners. Sooner or later, nurses care for all these characters in the EDs, clinics, universities, research labs, executive suites and staff rooms of their practices.

Two of the best known passages in Luke, one following the other, exemplify what I think is the perfect tension and attitude of nursing. The first, of course, is the Good Samaritan, whose story we tell over and over — the brutal attack of a man left for dead to the indifference of passersby and the unlikely Samaritan who cares for him. The directive to the young man whose question first prompted the parable, and the marching order for Catholic health care, is “Go and do likewise.”

On the heels of that imperative comes the story of Martha and Mary, which ends with an uncomfortable message for us Marthas of the world. Martha, the busy doer, versus Mary, the attentive observer. Martha is frantic with so much to do as Mary is immobilized by so much to learn at the feet, at the words, of the Lord. And when busy Martha complains — after all, she's the only one *doing* what needs to be done — Jesus chides her: “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her” (Luke 10:41-42).

The “one thing” that Jesus singles out is atten-

tion. The Samaritan's attention to the robbers' victim is as unflinching as is Mary's attention to what Jesus wants to tell her. There's no wedge forced between “doing likewise” and “choosing the better part” because the lesson is to do both, and everything else, attentively. Attending, tending, giving attention are what nurses do best.

“The capacity to give one's attention to a sufferer is a very rare and difficult thing; it is almost a miracle; it is a miracle,” wrote the French philosopher and mystic Simone Weil in *Waiting for God*. Weil's assertion is cited in the textbook *Critical Care Nursing* by Linda D. Urda et al. Weil also wrote, in a letter to a friend, “Attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity,” which has been quoted in two different articles by nurses in previous editions of *Health Progress*. Nurses seem to know their own propensity for the virtue of attention.

There is a small sense of gift with every issue of *Health Progress* we publish. It's a gift to be able to engage talented writers, insightful thinkers, clinical specialists and health care visionaries who provide readers with new information and ways to think about topics in the ministry. The sense of gift in the January-February edition became something different: what started as a focus on nurses evolved into a gift back to them. From the powerful introduction by Melanie Dreher, through many articles about the roles, innovations and aspirations of nursing, to the lovely reflection by Brian Doyle, this issue is meant as a mirror of who nurses are and a thanksgiving for what they do.

Happy New Year from all of us at *Health Progress*. We wish you good health, meaningful work, and generous attention given and received. We pray that the Year of Mercy will attune and embolden us all to bring about more peace on earth.

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