

Building a Community of Leaders in Illinois

BY ED GIGANTI

In his article "Nurturing the Ministry's Soul" in the September-October 2004 issue of *Health Progress*, Bill Cox described the creation of the Ministry Leadership Center through the collaboration of five Catholic health systems in the West. In October, the board of the center announced the appointment of Laurence J. O'Connell, PhD, STD, as executive director of this new approach to the formation of leaders for Catholic health care.

Now, 22 religious congregations sponsoring Catholic health facilities, together with the Catholic social service agencies in Illinois, are joining together to initiate a program of leadership formation for the health care and social services ministries. A pilot of the program, "Building a Community of Executive Leaders," begins this month. The program is sponsored by the Illinois Catholic Health Association (ICHA) and Catholic Theological Union (CTU), Chicago, in cooperation with the Institute for Pastoral Studies at Loyola University Chicago and Dominican University's St. Catherine of Siena Center, River Forest, IL. I recently spoke with Philip J. Karst, PhD, executive director of ICHA, to learn more about the program.

TOWARD LAY LEADERSHIP

The effort was initiated two years ago at a meeting of ICHA's corporate members, the bishops in Illinois, and the leaders of the congregations that sponsor Catholic health care in the state. "At that meeting, they discussed the transition in the ministry toward one that has more and more lay people in leadership roles, at both sponsorship and executive levels. "There was concern about the laity's preparation for assuming these responsibilities," Karst said. "Many lay people entering these roles haven't had formal training on Catholic ethics or on the issues around Catholic identity. They may not have the knowledge, the vocabulary, or the recognition to effectively lead a ministry of the Catholic Church."

The outcome of the discussion was the forma-



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tion of a task force to focus attention on the issues and develop strategies for dealing with them. Eventually, the task force divided into two groups, one examining issues of lay sponsorship and another addressing preparation for executive leaders. Terry McGuire, EdD, vice president of mission integration at Wheaton Franciscan Services, Inc., led the second group. "They worked from the assumption that there is a lot of good work already done in leadership formation," Karst said. "Why reinvent the wheel?"

As it is being piloted, the program consists of a one-year educational experience. Karst said that a cohort of 20 to 25 senior level executives from health and social service ministry organizations will be accepted for the pilot. These leaders will participate in three "mini-retreats" and regular audio conferences and online dialogues covering three broad areas of study:

- Foundations of the church, its history and teachings, and its application to leadership in the 21st century
- Theological and ministerial development, with a focus on ethics and social justice
- Directions of organizational leadership in a Catholic organization

Retreats will require two nights and one work-day each from participants. Audio conferences and online dialogues are expected to require about five hours per month.

In addition, each participant will be paired with an advisor with whom he or she will meet, face to face during retreats and via e-mail throughout the year.

A MODEL OF THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Karst said the program has been built on a model of theological reflection. "It involves tradition, culture, and the subcultures of health care and social services, as well as personal experience. This particular model has been identified as a way to understand the world and to bring the tradition of the church to the world," he said. "The first time the group gets together, they will learn this theo-

logical reflection model. They will also bring to the program real-life situations with which they are dealing—cases of opening or closing lines of service or how to pay employees—and examine these cases in light of what they are learning about theology. The intent is to bring the tradition and teaching to real-life circumstances.”

The program is intended to:

- Foster a community of leaders for Catholic health and social service ministries
- Enhance individuals’ understanding of the foundations of Catholic ministries
- Transform participants’ understanding of and approach to addressing operational and strategic matters within the organizations they lead

“The goal is to live a different way,” Karst said, “to transform a person’s understanding. Participants will not just be exposed to a lot of topics. They will be expected to move this information into how they react to the world.”

A core team of faculty members from CTU, Loyola University Chicago, and Dominican University designed the program and will teach it. Karst said that ICHA turned to CTU and Fr. Thomas Nairn, a professor of ethics there, because of a previously existing relationship. Fr. Nairn, along with Fr. Myles Sheehan, SJ, MD, of Loyola’s Stritch School of Medicine, provided ethics consultation on end-of-life issues when, several years ago, ICHA brought together various resource people in response to growing threats of physician-assisted suicide. Their input contributed to the 2001 pastoral letter, signed by all the bishops of Illinois, “Facing the End of Life.”

Karst said that ICHA hopes the program will yield these outcomes:

- Greater understanding and appreciation of the importance of the Catholic health and social service ministries within the life of the church
- Enhanced abilities among leaders to integrate Catholic tradition and teachings into addressing the operational and strategic challenges facing health ministry organizations today
- Health and social services agencies strengthened to meet the challenges of the future

“The bishops are very enthusiastic about the program,” Karst said. “We hope that, after completing the program, participants will be recognized in some public way by their local bishops.”

Karst added that tuition for the program is low, making it possible for leaders from social service agencies and long-term care facilities to par-

ticipate. The cost is \$2,000 per participant, covering all housing and meals at retreats and all materials. In addition, ICHA has established a scholarship fund in the name of the late Bishop Edwin Conway, who was health care liaison for the Archdiocese of Chicago and former chairman of Catholic Charities in the city. Applications for scholarships to cover a portion of the program fees are available from ICHA.

For more information on “Building a Community of Executive Leaders,” contact Karst at pkarst@il-cha.org.

FROM MISSION TO SERVICE

In November, I had the opportunity to observe the first of two modules of a new leadership formation program for Catholic Charities leadership offered at the University of Notre Dame. Called “From Mission to Service,” this program of mission-based leadership and organization development offers a curriculum developed by the university’s Department of Theology and Mendoza College of Business.

Carolyn Woo, PhD, dean of Mendoza College, told me that the university was approached by Catholic Charities USA leadership to create a program for leaders of local Catholic Charities agencies. Woo said the program represents a first for Notre Dame—the first joint project of the theology and business departments. Notre Dame underwrote all the costs of the program except travel and lodging expenses for participants. Woo said that because of the university’s contribution, the program was able to stipulate a high level of commitment from participants. Each participating agency was required to send a team of three to five people, including the executive director and at least one trustee.

Teams of managers and trustees—45 people in all—attended the first program. During the two and one-half days, they participated in sessions on Catholic social teaching, the mission of Catholic Charities, leadership and mission, and values-based decision making. Each team brought the concept for an action-learning project to the program. During the months leading up to the second module, scheduled for March 14-16, they will work on these projects independently. Woo and other Notre Dame faculty are available for consultation as needed. The teams will present the results of their projects when the group convenes in March. □

*The
University of
Notre Dame
underwrote
most of the
program’s
expenses.*

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