

# Leadership and the Core Commitments

BY ED GIGANTI

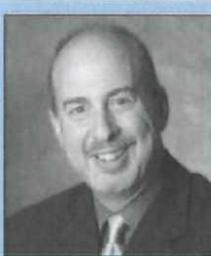
**S**everal years ago, I had the great opportunity to work with many leaders in the health ministry in a project that resulted in the *Shared Statement of Identity for the Catholic Health Ministry*. Along with writing the statement, the project also named the core commitments that flow from that expression of who we are who continue Jesus' work of healing. This project was, for me, a remarkable experience: listening to and learning from people in a variety of roles—administrators, clinicians, trustees, sponsors, mission leaders, and others—as they articulated what, for them, was the essence of our ministry.

The statement and the core commitments that emerged from the input of these people were communicated throughout the ministry and still have currency today. They express to the communities we serve what it is we believe, what we value, and what they can expect from us in the sacred relationships of which we are a part. Likewise, for the people who join us in this ministry, the statement and commitments teach in clear, straightforward language, about the mission of service and transformation, about the culture that is necessary to enact that mission, and about the individual behaviors which build up that culture.

Recently, while reading a book on leadership, I was struck with the question: What do the core commitments say to leaders in the ministry about themselves, about how they are to be? Beyond seeing these seven commitments as directing and describing the work of our ministry in reaching out to those in need, the commitments can also provide a useful framework for leaders' individual reflection and renewal.

## DEFENDING HUMAN DIGNITY

The first of the core commitments is to promote and defend human dignity. Respect for human dignity is a cornerstone of the Catholic health ministry and infuses all our commitments. This concern and reverence for the dignity inherent in each human person springs from our belief that



*Ed Giganti is senior director, ministry leadership development, Catholic Health Association, St. Louis.*

each of us has been created in the image and likeness of God. Of course, this understanding moves leaders in the ministry to ensure that the care our organizations provide is respectful of those we serve and those who serve with us.

But what of the dignity of the leader him- or herself? What way of being in work and in life promotes the leader's own dignity? What does it mean for oneself to be created in God's image and likeness? Such recognition, fully considered, points to questions of individual purpose and vocation. In light of my own dignity, what do I stand for, and what has God called me to do?

Second among the ministry's core commitments is the promise to attend to the whole person. This commitment is at the heart of our programs of spiritual care, quality assurance, and even housing. But for the individual leader, this commitment calls for attention to one's physical, mental, and spiritual health. If each of us is, as we believe, a fully integrated body/spirit unity, then how is the leadership each one provides affected when the leader is exhausted, demoralized, or ill?

Our ministry also commits to care for poor and vulnerable persons, and our "preference" for the poor is a hallmark of Catholic health care. Beyond our tradition of charity toward and solidarity with those who are poor, this commitment seems to call the individual leader to reflect on her or his own brokenness. Examining one's weaknesses or losses for valuable lessons often makes stronger leaders. Warren Bennis, the noted author on leadership and management, has written about the importance of "crucible experiences" in the life and development of leaders, those times of hardship, tragedy, or failure that forge leadership strength. For the spiritually grounded leader, such experiences can more clearly reveal the movement of God in one's career, vocation, and life.

## FOR THE COMMON GOOD

The ministry's commitment to promote the common good is rooted in the belief that human per-

sons flourish in community, since they are beings created in the image and likeness of a God who also lives in the community of the Trinity. For leaders in ministry organizations, this commitment suggests that one take time to name, recognize, and give thanks for the communities of support to which the leaders belong: teams, boards, employee groups, civic organizations, families, parishes, and many others. Who joins the leader in his or her community? What do they offer? What do they need?

The next of our ministry's core commitments is to act on behalf of justice. The church's rich tradition of justice teaching animates and guides the health ministry, but for many people in Catholic health care, the social teachings are little known or understood. In committing to act on behalf of justice, the ministry commits to creating life-giving relationships with people who come for service and those who come to serve, with persons in need across the planet, and with the planet itself. For the leader in the ministry, this commitment calls for a clear understanding of the church's social teaching, and so this commitment may call the leader to deeper study of that teaching. Also, it raises questions about the leader's own sense of solidarity with all peoples of the Earth, and his or her defense and preservation of the natural resources of our planet.

The ministry also commits to steward resources wisely, recognizing that all that we have has been given to us by a generous and loving God. In her or his leadership role, the executive, manager, or trustee may first think of the institution's tangible resources—capital, physical plant, work force—when considering the responsibility for stewardship. But the commitment to steward resources also applies to how a leader uses his or her own gifts, the skills, knowledge, time, intuition, and others, that can be developed or diminished. Many Catholic health care organizations have implemented tools for identifying and assessing leaders' competencies. These tools can be the beginning of a leader's deep understanding of his or her gifts. An individual commitment to lifelong personal and professional development expresses wise stewardship of one's own gifts for

## Catholic health care is sacrament.

work in ministry as well as in all the relationships of one's life.

### COMMUNION WITH THE CHURCH

Finally, the health ministry commits to act in communion with the Roman Catholic Church because it is an essential element of the mission of the church in the world. *Communio* (and its Greek root, *koinonia*) does not mean "community" in the original Latin, but instead means "participation" in the good things of salvation, in the Holy Spirit, in the Gospel, and above all, in the Eucharist. The communion of the church, then, is grace and gift, common participation in one truth and one life, participation in the love that God communicates to us in word and sacrament through Christ, in the Holy Spirit.

Catholic health care is sacrament, making present in every healing encounter the love of God for God's people. This commitment to act in communion with the church reminds leaders in the health care ministry—as it does all who serve in Catholic health care—of this sacred responsibility to be instruments revealing God's love, instruments of Jesus' healing touch. At the center of the leader's reflection on these seven core commitments is this profound question: How do I make present God's radical, transforming love in the moments of my life? □

### A Shared Statement of Identity for the Catholic Health Ministry

We are the people of Catholic health care, a ministry of the church continuing Jesus' mission of love and healing today. As provider, employer, advocate, citizen—bringing together people of diverse faiths and backgrounds—our ministry is an enduring sign of health care rooted in our belief that every person is a treasure, every life a sacred gift, every human being a unity of body, mind, and spirit.

We work to bring alive the Gospel vision of justice and peace. We answer God's call to foster healing, act with compassion, and promote wellness for all persons and communities, with special attention to our neighbors who are poor, underserved, and most vulnerable. By our service, we strive to transform hurt into hope.