

## PERSPECTIVE

*Editor's Note: "Perspective" is an occasional column that features updates, points of view and brief discussions of issues by guest authors and CHA staff.*

# A PRIVILEGED LIFE

**W**hen I was in first grade, our benevolent and portly pastor, Fr. Kelly, on one of his weekly visits to the first grade classroom, asked, "How many girls would like to be sisters when they grow up?" We all greatly admired our teacher, so every girl's hand shot up, waving in the air — save one.



**SR. PATRICIA  
TALONE**

"Miss Talone, why don't you want to be a sister?" he queried. Although a little intimidated, I answered that I had other hopes for the future, among them to travel and see the whole world. Fr. Kelly later recounted the exchange to my parents, warning them that I expected a privileged life.

Both of our dreams came true in the end. A call to religious life as a Sister of Mercy and a multitude of educational and ministerial opportunities offered me privilege far greater — and far different — than I could imagine at that age. Furthermore, if privilege is as Webster describes, "a special opportunity to do something that makes you proud," then my life, especially these last 15-plus years at the Catholic Health Association, has indeed been privileged. In first grade, I had no desire to leave my family or the familiarity of my small world to be of service within the church, but I have come to recognize, in the words of Mark 10:30, that I have received a hundredfold of undreamed-of blessings.

The greatest privilege of these past years has been working with a team of unbelievably talented, creative, fun women and men. As colleagues we consulted, challenged and supported one another. Each one's commitment to excellence and service has made my job a delight and fueled within me a zeal to serve as well as they do.

The gift of being invited to visit and work with CHA members throughout the country has been another mark of good fortune. Traveling to Duluth, Minnesota (even in January), or Sioux Falls, South Dakota (on the opening weekend of

pheasant hunting season), visiting a low-income apartment complex built in a former African-American school in the heart of Savannah, Georgia, quietly sitting in a mobile health clinic for immigrants outside of Richmond, Virginia, conducting a multiweek mission assessment at one of the (then) oldest Catholic hospitals in the country, St. Vincent's in Greenwich Village, New York — these and so many other opportunities filled me with admiration and awe at the palpable presence of Jesus in the daily actions of the women and men who sustain and carry this ministry.

In CHA's annual ecclesiology and spirituality pilgrimage in Rome, I have been fortunate to accompany our ministry's leaders at a hallowed time in their lives. I've sat next to usually buttoned-up CEOs and seen them weep with awe and joy at the immensity of a faith that is universal. I watched a skilled physician study Pope John Paul II at what would be our last audience with that pope. The now-saint's courage and determination in the face of illness and diminution profoundly touched the physician. Women and men (executives, board members and sponsors) accustomed to having others jump to their ideas and schedules knelt in silent receptivity and humility at the tomb of St. Francis of Assisi, asking God for the saint's simplicity and zeal. Being in Rome is always an honor, but being there with pilgrims from Catholic health care is a privilege beyond price.

During most of my years at CHA, I have been vice-president of mission services, but I have never stopped being an ethicist. While ethics consults were no longer at the bedside, the urgency with which we ethicists at CHA listened to, studied and responded to ethics consults was nonetheless crucial. My life has been enriched by hundreds of

clinical consults. Always I have felt honored to be called, knowing that this “case” is about a specific patient, an agonizing family and a dedicated staff trying to provide the best care that they can give. Moreover, organizational ethics consults, while not usually as time-sensitive or urgent, focus on the moral integrity not just of individuals but of the ministry as a whole.

Whenever a stranger on a plane asks me what I do for a living, I answer that I am a teacher — for that is what I am. Being able to teach administrators, physicians, nurses, mission leaders, communicators and housekeepers — the whole gamut of dedicated persons who serve in Catholic health care — has been an incalculable blessing for me. My father used to joke that he couldn’t believe I got paid to speak. “You’ve been doing that since

you were 12 months old” he remonstrated with me. He was right, of course, but I’ve learned that the gifts God gives one are to be used for others. CHA has provided me with the opportunity to do just that.

It is because of these privileged years that I now return to my first loves — consulting, teaching and writing. My hope is that the zeal that has grown within me at CHA is something I can transmit to a new generation of Catholic health care leaders. Fr. Kelly’s warning to my parents was partially right. I don’t know if I expected a privileged life, but I have surely lived one. Thank you for such an inestimable gift.

**SR. PATRICIA TALONE, RSM, PhD**, is CHA’s recently retired vice president for mission services.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

[www.chausa.org](http://www.chausa.org)

# HEALTH PROGRESS®

---

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, September - October 2016  
Copyright © 2016 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States

---