

Leader

Most merciful God, You have entrusted your healing ministry of service to us as workers, leaders, and trustees of Catholic health care. Let us be mindful of the sacrifices of those who began the Catholic health ministry in America's communities. Give us the courage, vision, creativity, perseverance, and compassion to continue that ministry as they would if they were here today.

All Amen.

READING

Leader

"In 1866, diphtheria, yellow fever, and typhoid were rampant in Texas. In May, the second bishop of Galveston—a diocese that encompassed the entire state—set out for his native France to seek help. In Lyons, he asked the Sisters of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament to help him found a new congregation to respond to the health needs of the people in Texas.

"On October 24, Srs. M. Blandine, Joseph, and Ange arrived in Galveston. They were the first three women religious in a new congregation, the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. A small building served as both hospital and convent.

"Charity Hospital opened on April 1. Its mission: to care for the sick and for orphans. A mere three months later, Galveston experienced the worst yellow fever epidemic in its history. Two of the sisters fell ill. Mother Blandine died, and Sr. Ange eventually recovered. . . .

"In the days before antibiotics many of the people admitted to a hospital died there. It was



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Service to
Our Communities

not uncommon for both parents in a family to be stricken by a deadly disease, leaving their children orphaned. It was to meet the needs of these times that the sisters housed orphans on a floor of the hospital. . . .

"Begging was a daily activity. The sisters in charge of the kitchen often had to wait for the other sisters to return from begging at the market before preparing dinner. When sisters went to beg in distant parts of the state, they often brought back so many orphans that the money they had collected was immediately used up."

—Suzy Farren, *A Call to Care: The Women Who Built Catholic Healthcare in the United States*, Catholic Health Association, St. Louis, 1996, pp. 105-106.

REFLECTION

If those three sisters—or other founders of the Catholic health ministry in this nation—were in our community today, what might they see that we are not seeing? What services might they offer? How might they find the resources needed to meet the serious challenges facing our communities?

CLOSING PRAYER

"Make us worthy, Lord, to serve those people throughout the world who live and die in poverty and hunger. Give them through our hands, this day, their daily bread, and by our understanding love, give them peace and joy."

—Mother Teresa of Calcutta

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