

PRESERVING CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE'S FOOTPRINT IN POST-ACUTE SERVICES

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In reflecting on my life and the profound impact that Catholic health care and the dedicated work of Catholic sisters have had on my journey, I find it fitting to introduce Carith Ministries, an organization born last year from a rich tapestry of experiences rooted in compassion, care and community service.

The inspiration for Carith Ministries emerged from a powerful conversation I had in 2008 with Sr. Mary Caritas of the Sisters of Providence. Her words resonated deeply: “Finance person, you need to preserve the footprint of the Catholic post-acute ministry.” By addressing me as “finance person,” not only was she referring to my role in finance at the time, but she was also trying to tell me that financial stewardship needed to be embraced to maintain and preserve the Catholic identity. This moment crystallized my understanding of the responsibility that comes with managing the resources of Catholic institutions. It became clear that finance and stewardship were not just about numbers; they were about safeguarding the mission and values of the Church.

A FOCUS ON MISSION SUSTAINABILITY

So what is Carith Ministries, and why was it formed? Quite simply, the Carmelite Sisters for the Aged and Infirm identified a pressing trend and decided to boldly respond with a solution: to offer a Catholic-sponsored ministry focused on supporting Catholic post-acute care, senior services and other related ministries to ensure a vibrant future for the Catholic Church. Our mission is not just to preserve but to carry forward these ministries that align with our values and Catholic social teaching.

As one of the few congregational-sponsored post-acute entities seeking to preserve the Catholic footprint, we provide Catholic-sponsored ex-

pertise for real estate management, construction, marketing, business development, operations, revenue management, finance and strategic banking. Carith Ministries assists congregations and other Catholic ministries in their discernment process regarding strategic options and keeps our costs for overhead and services within 4% to help preserve ministry assets. By aligning with experts in these fields, we ensure that these ministries can make informed decisions that benefit their communities.

Originating from the Fitzgerald Institute for Real Estate at Notre Dame University, Carith Ministries provides options for Catholic sponsors of post-acute ministries. It focuses on affordable housing and the preservation of church properties. Therefore, we are not just looking to manage or own skilled nursing facilities, but to work with other ministries who are looking to find cost-effective solutions to serve middle- to low-income community members with various needs (for example, the infirm, seniors, etc.) through affordable housing. This effort helps maintain the Catholic Church's presence and honors the legacy of those who dedicated their lives to service.

Currently, Carith Ministries serves areas in New York, Florida, Iowa, Ohio, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Illinois and even internationally in Ireland, with plans to expand into Michigan, Maine and Rhode Island. The mission emphasizes delivering exceptional care to more than 3,000 residents, supported by a workforce

of more than 3,500 employees and 120 sisters actively serving in these communities.

We are committed to ensuring that aged religious and vulnerable populations receive the care they deserve within the fiscal constraints allotted to the service line. If for-profit organizations can find ways to survive, so can we. It requires leveraging our strengths, preserving our balance sheets, maintaining our real estate, and aligning with market needs.

This is a financial stewardship decision. That's what was so brilliant in Sr. Caritas' statement to me — she emphasized the role of financial stewardship, not just clinical leadership or executive oversight. Preserving what we have while acknowledging and accepting constraints is crucial. We are focused on mission sustainability, especially in post-acute care. It is not only possible but imperative.

FINDING PURPOSE

As a young child growing up in western Pennsylvania, I vividly recall the warmth and kindness of the nurses during my visit to a Mercy hospital in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, when I broke my arm. The comforting presence of the crosses adorning the walls reminded me of the love and safety I felt in church. This early experience of compassionate care laid the groundwork for my understanding of the vital role that Catholic health care plays in the lives of individuals and families.

Years later, I found myself back at that same hospital as my grandmother battled cancer. It was a time when patients often stayed at hospitals for extended periods, and the atmosphere was one of unwavering support and empathy. On the day my grandmother passed, I sat in the lobby, playing with my Barbie doll, when a Mercy sister approached me. She invited me to the snack shop for a hamburger and a milkshake, and during our conversation, she imparted wisdom about love, loss and the importance of being there for my mother. That moment and the kindness of the sister left an indelible mark on my heart, exemplifying the unique spirit of Catholic health care.

Years later, as an adult starting my professional career in accounting for a major secular retirement community, I felt a void — a lack of purpose that I later found in Catholic health care. A pivotal moment came during a meeting when I was asked about hitting the glass ceiling. That ques-

tion prompted me to seek opportunities within Catholic health care, where I discovered a culture that valued diversity and embraced the contributions of women.

My experiences in Catholic health care were transformative. I had the privilege of working alongside remarkable leaders who taught me the importance of trust, delegation and mentorship. Sr. Julie Casey, IHM, a dear friend and mentor, guided me in understanding the challenges faced by religious sisters as they transitioned their ministries. It was through these relationships and insights that I recognized the urgent need to preserve the legacy of Catholic health care.

PRESERVING THE CATHOLIC IDENTITY

Looking ahead, Carith Ministries aspires to expand our reach into affordable housing and educational programs for individuals with disabilities. In a time when many Catholic ministries are at risk of being sold or diminished, Carith Ministries stands firm in its mission to safeguard and nurture these vital services. We recognize the rich history and teachings of Jesus that have guided Catholic health care for generations and seek to honor that legacy through our actions.

As we move forward, we are dedicated to building a sustainable model that preserves the values of Catholic health care while addressing the evolving needs of our communities. Our commitment to education, training and responsible financial management will ensure that we remain a viable presence in the lives of those we serve.

Carith Ministries embodies the spirit of compassion, resilience and faith that has been central to my life and the lives of many others. We are here to ensure that the legacy of Catholic sisters, priests and brothers who built this ministry continues to shine brightly for generations to come. Together, we can navigate the challenges ahead, preserving the footprint of the Catholic Church and offering hope to those in need. Let us be a testament to the power of collaboration, creativity and unwavering commitment to our shared mission of service.

To learn more about Carith Ministries, visit <https://www.carithministries.org>.

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