

Assembly Provides Opportunities for Dialogue

BY REV. MICHAEL D. PLACE, STD

In my commissioning remarks at the Catholic Health Assembly in June (p. 40), I focused on the challenges facing the Catholic health ministry. But at various events throughout the assembly, I also had the opportunity to discuss the Catholic Health Association's goals for carrying the ministry into the next millennium. This column summarizes some of what I reported there about how CHA as an intentional community plans to build a future in which the ministry flourishes.

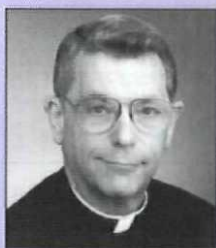
RELATIONS WITH SYSTEMS

As we move forward together, a hallmark of CHA must be a style of participatory dialogue in which all the voices of the ministry can be heard. The assembly provided many opportunities for such dialogue. At a breakfast on "Maintaining Catholic Identity in a Pluralistic World," more than 80 system sponsors and CEOs shared their views. In light of the concerns they expressed and CHA's revised membership and dues structure, CHA has established a new Systems Task Force of experienced system leaders to help CHA respond to systems in a way that enhances, but does not duplicate, their efforts.

COMMITMENT TO ADVOCACY

At meetings of advocacy coordinators and of executives of state Catholic health associations and conferences, I emphasized CHA's continuing, unequivocal commitment to sustaining and strengthening its historical excellence in advocacy. In the coming years, our influence in Washington, DC, and on the state level will be crucial—indeed, a central element of our mission—if the Catholic health ministry is to be a transformational presence in society.

This summer CHA is working hard with members to urge the U.S. Congress to reinforce the principles that neither individuals nor organizations should be subject to discrimination because



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they choose not to provide, refer for, or pay for abortions, and that no government entity may discriminate against such a provider.

SPONSORSHIP EMPHASIS

At a Sunday morning breakfast with sponsors, I explained how CHA is responding to CHA members' concerns about the future of sponsorship. Sr. Jean deBlois, CSJ, RN, PhD, will serve as interim vice president of Sponsor Services while continuing in her role as CHA's vice president of Mission Services. She will work closely with the expanded Sponsor Services Committee and its new chairperson, Sr. June Ketterer, SGM, provincial superior of the Grey Nuns, to provide suggestions about further direction. In the meantime, she will experiment with how best to integrate the distinct but essentially related responsi-



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bilities of mission, theology, leadership development, and sponsorship. Joanne Elden Beale, who has been providing leadership in Sponsor Services, will continue working in that area, while also assuming responsibility, as director of the assembly, for the planning and organization of CHA's annual national meeting.

NEW WORK STYLE

The style with which CHA carries forward its work is evolving in several ways to be more consistent with CHA's vision of itself as a more responsive, adaptable, and efficient organization:

- During the assembly more than 300 members gathered at a "Continuing the Conversations" lunch. In an informal setting they had the opportunity to speak with CHA staff and with each other about issues facing the ministry and the association.

- A newly formed Assembly Advisory Committee will assist CHA staff with planning future assemblies.

- An advisory group of system representatives and others will help CHA develop a response to MergerWatch and other groups that oppose affiliations of Catholic organizations with other-than-Catholic entities.

- Within the association, a management structure has been put in place to ensure that CHA's strategic objectives are addressed in a timely and effective way. The structure is not a radical change, but builds on the good work initiated two years ago in support of the board-directed refounding of CHA—changes that included use of cross-disciplinary teams and better integration of the St. Louis and Washington, DC, offices.

In the enhanced structure, a core leadership group composed of CHA's president, executive vice president, senior vice president for planning and policy

development, and vice president of Mission Services and interim vice president of Sponsor Services will facilitate the work of the senior management team, which is responsible for coordinating CHA's work.

A MINISTRY INITIATIVE

The theme of the assembly, "Mission in the Marketplace," became quite poignant for the audience at the awards banquet, when Sr. Jane Frances Brady, SC, received the Sr. Concilia Moran Award. Inspired by the example Sr. Jane sets as she works to change the marketplace through her special mission to the poor, I suggested that, as a community of delivery organizations, we consider pooling resources to create a powerful and visionary mission initiative for changing the marketplace. More specifically, by way of example, I suggested we consider the possibility of the systems, especially those with greater financial reserves, creating a special fund for financing "demonstration projects" for working more effectively to realize healthier communities, particularly for the poor. The initial response from members to the basic idea has been affirming.

Wherever I spoke with CHA members at the assembly, I was impressed by the energy, the focus, and the commitment to carrying out Jesus' healing ministry evidenced by every person I encountered. I am more confident than ever that the community that is CHA will be able to work together to sustain a strong Catholic health ministry that accomplishes meaningful transformation of the marketplace. □

To share your thoughts about the ministry, contact Fr. Place at the Catholic Health Association, 4455 Woodson Rd., St. Louis, MO 63134-3797; e-mail: mplace@chausa.org.