

# Catholic Identity: A Unifying Force

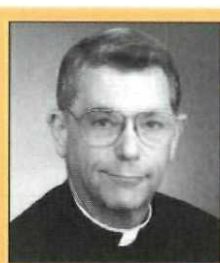
BY REV. MICHAEL D. PLACE, STD

**W**e frequently hear that people hold a surprising number of different views about what it means for an organization to be Catholic, but recently I was delighted to witness remarkable agreement among members of the Catholic health ministry. At three meetings last fall, representatives of several healthcare systems dialogued about the meaning of Catholic identity. Although they came from many locales and held a variety of positions within their organizations, the meeting participants voiced significantly similar ideas about our Church-sponsored ministry.

CHA convened the meetings in response to its members' requests for an explicit articulation of the characteristics that distinguish Catholic healthcare organizations. On several occasions, members have indicated an urgent need for a common understanding that will help them maintain their identity as the ministry evolves. Today we see Catholic and non-Catholic organizations forming new types of partnerships and laypeople assuming broader roles in the ministry. In addition, Catholic organizations communicate with a variety of secular and religious audiences. If they can clearly convey the significance of their Catholic identity, they will enhance the role of the Catholic health ministry as an agent for change—in communities, in the political arena, and in its own entities.

## AGREEMENT ON CORE COMMITMENTS

As a starting point for dialogue, participants at the fall meetings were asked, "What core characteristics or commitments does Catholic identity entail?" Their



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responses at each of the meetings converged around 10 key themes. Briefly, they are as follows:

- **Serving as instruments of God's work and healing ministry.** Catholic institutions are committed to transforming themselves as needed so that they can always serve their communities, acting as an embodiment of the healing mission of Jesus Christ.

- **Adhering to Gospel values and Catholic social teaching.** With the Church's traditions as guideposts, Catholic healthcare organizations reflect continuously on what they do and how they do it.

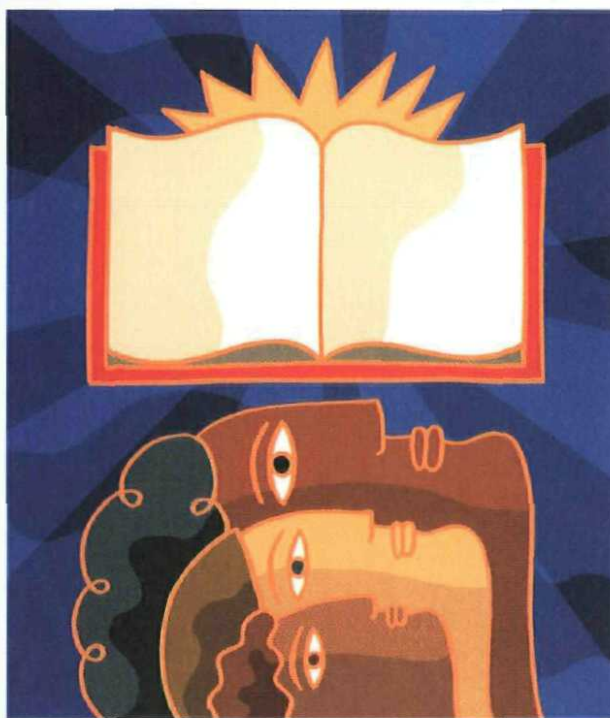
- **Bringing spirituality to healing.** Catholic identity means ministering to the body, mind, and spirit in a holistic approach that recognizes the human person as more than a physical being.

- **Demonstrating respect for the person.** The prime motivation for ministry is a belief that each person is made in the image of God and possesses innate goodness and dignity. The Catholic health ministry thus serves people with compassion, provides hope, and insists on high-quality care.

- **Focusing on the common good.** Catholic organizations seek to contribute to the well-being of all persons in society.

- **Providing for the most needy.** As Jesus did, Catholic health organizations serve the poor especially. To do this, they engage their communities in identifying services they should offer, and they advocate for policies that help those with the greatest needs.

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## REFLECTIONS

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**C**atholic identity compels organizations to act as an agent of change.

• **Coministering with employees.**

This commitment encompasses helping employees to realize their full potential; ensuring that all employees, Catholic and non-Catholic, understand and live out values flowing from the Catholic tradition; and treating employees justly.

• **Challenging and transforming.**

Catholic identity compels organizations, by their example and their willingness to take risks, to act as an agent of change in society and within the ministry.

• **Collaborating.** Recognizing that they cannot effectively accomplish all they want without others, Catholic organizations seek partners who share their values. In new relationships, they challenge others to take on new responsibilities.

• **Serving as stewards.** Catholic institutions acknowledge they are accountable to others for how they use their resources and they make ethical decisions regarding how resources are deployed.

As I reflect on these core commitments, it seems to me that the Catholic health ministry has a unique opportunity to bring about transformation in society and in the delivery of health-care so that people's needs are better served. I hope these shared ideas can be a source of hope for those of us in the Catholic health ministry. If we can agree on the commitments that form the core of our identity, and apparently we do, we can create a strong, unified vision for the future—a vision of who we are and what we want to accomplish. □

# Putting Patients First RESPONSE

## How Do You Help Patients Feel Comfortable?

In the November-December issue of *Health Progress*, we asked you what your organization does to help patients and their families feel "at home" and comfortable during their hospital experience. Here is a response we received. Answer this issue's question on p. 15, and we'll publish your answers.

### VCRS AND TEDDY BEARS

We do the following to help patients and their families feel "at home":

• A volunteer-run "room service" provides patients with daily papers, VCRs and videotapes, personal stereos, and other items to help make their stay a bit more relaxed.

• We allow family members to stay with the patient in the room, if possible and appropriate. We also provide reduced-fee lodging at "Providence Cottage" for families of open-heart surgery patients and others who travel long distances to be with patients who are seriously ill.

• Our pediatric unit welcomes each new patient and family with a special bear that is waiting on their bed or crib. This special friend accompanies our young patients while they are in the hospital, and

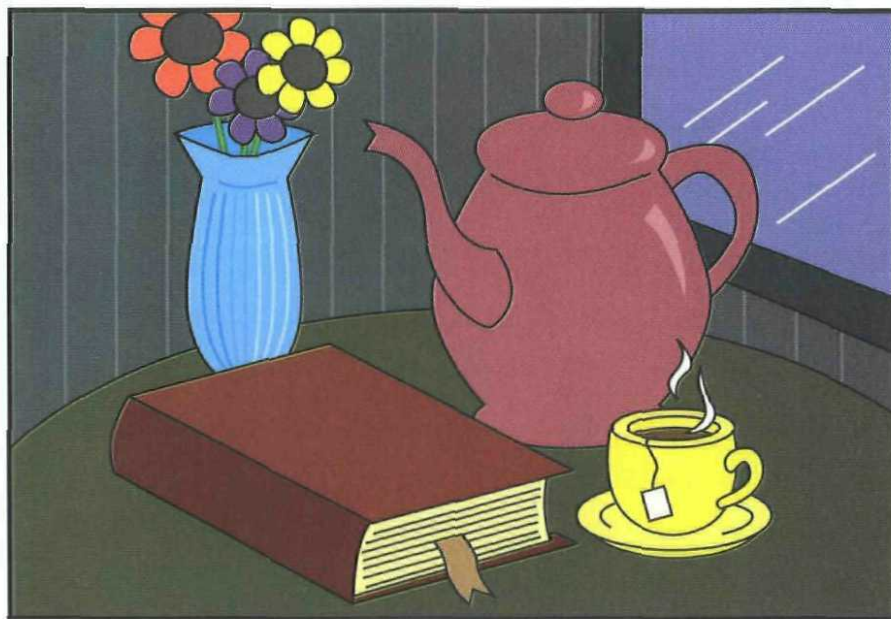
goes with them on their return home. The pediatric unit also has child-friendly murals and playrooms.

• Many wonderful volunteers escort patients and families to diagnostic areas. On patients' arrival, a volunteer in each waiting room offers free refreshments, a sympathetic ear, and an update on scheduling.

• We offer as many choices as possible to patients and their families so that, in a new environment, they have as many factors under their own control as possible.

• Our "take a minute" nursing program encourages our busy nursing professionals to take a moment to engage each patient and inquire, "How is it going?"

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Illustrations by Lin Wilson