

EDITOR'S NOTE

The Francis Effect is everywhere. It not only describes the ecclesial and pastoral issues being raised and celebrated by the Roman Catholic Church and its members, but it also encompasses a range of photo ops and press coverage that politicians and celebrities would envy. Without even trying, Francis pulled off the papal hat trick of having his face on the covers of *America*, *Time* and *Rolling Stone* in the same year. For most Catholics, this is the stuff of hope: they are ready to be recharged and to reinvest in their Catholic identity.



MARY ANN
STEINER

When CHA's board met in February, it balanced the business of each day with periodic reflections on the words of Pope Francis. One of the guest speakers, John L. Allen Jr. of the *Boston Globe*, discussed three characteristics of the pope's theology and leadership style: the virtue of mercy; living out the social gospel; and the model of servant leadership. This was fertile ground for CHA to pursue. Are these three aspects of the Francis Effect specifically relevant to Catholic health care? It is certainly worth an issue of *Health Progress* to explore, which we have done with articles that approach the topic from theological, pastoral, practical and whimsical starting points. Moving from our usual practice of a single illustrator, we have engaged a number of talented artists to portray the pope's presence and message in different and intriguing images.

At first blush, the Francis Effect is a nicely coined term for a phenomenon ripe for naming. But embedded in the catchphrase is a redemptive hope. The scandal of pedophile priests and the financial misdeeds at the Vatican Bank left the church and Catholic faithful dispirited and defensive. Little wonder that we were ready to embrace the new pope and his modest, warm-hearted, inclusive ways. Yep, he's our guy, we claim with Catholic pride. He's really what Catholicism is all about. Just watch.

Just watching is the problem. The Francis Effect won't succeed as a spectator sport. The pope isn't saying what he's saying and doing what he's doing for the next episode of "Vatican Abbey," scripted for visual effect. He's calling us, with holy urgency and joy, to our true Catholic identity.

The real Francis Effect has to do with the constancy of message and manner that defines Francis' papacy. It is strikingly similar to what Catholic health care claims to be.

When the pope says he wants a church that is poor and for the poor, let's believe that he means it. Caring for the poor is how the church lives out the virtue of mercy. Catholic health care has always claimed a preferential option for the poor, but the Francis Effect may demand new understandings of the blessedness of being poor in spirit.

The pope's understanding of living out the social gospel seems closely tied to his insistence on inclusivity. He regularly seeks out those who previously had been kept from the table or out of the conversation. His famously quoted question "Who am I to judge?" sometimes has been interpreted as "anything goes." But Francis' recurrent theme that every person matters is very different from "anything goes."

That is a profoundly important distinction for Catholic health care. Many of the issues most neuralgic for the ministry — women's health, cooperation in new partnerships, end-of-life care — call for more information, open avenues of communication and firm commitment to Catholic principles and values.

Flannery O'Connor, one of America's great Catholic writers, said, "What people don't realize is how much religion costs. They think faith is a big electric blanket, when of course it is the cross." She's right, as people of faith know only too well. The Holy Father knows the costs and the risks of living the faith. As much as he decries the plight of people who are poor or treated unjustly, he is neither naïve nor undone by witnessing suffering or confronting evil.

Neither is he, in the words of C. S. Lewis, surprised by joy. Pope Francis' joy is a source, an underpinning, and the only reasonable attribute of one who is sure of God's love and God's call. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he says, "I understand the grief of people who have to endure great suffering, yet slowly but surely we all have to let the joy of faith slowly revive as a quiet yet firm trust, even amid the greatest distress."

This is the model of servant leadership Pope Francis gives to Catholic health care. Servant leaders have to be grounded in reality and girded with joy. They must lead with full knowledge of the pitfalls of the health care industry overall and the particular challenges of the healing ministry. When the dirtiest, most difficult tasks need doing, they have to show up in person as well as spirit. And they need to be the face of the energy and joy Jesus gave the first beneficiaries of the healing ministry when he cured the Phoenician woman and gave sight to Bartimaeus. Talk about patient satisfaction beyond measure.

Can we, the people of Catholic health care, embrace the Francis Effect to save, improve and ground our ministry?

How can we not?

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