

REFLECTION

‘Something New’ In the New Year

SR. JENNIFER GORDON, SCL

When I made my first vows as a Sister of Charity of Leavenworth in 2004, I chose one of my favorite Scripture passages as the first reading in my vow liturgy. “See,” God says to us through the prophet Isaiah. “I am doing something new!” (Isaiah 43:19)

As Scripture is wont to do, those words from Isaiah felt as if they were intended just for me, whispered by God into the silent places of my heart on that special day. Yes! God was, indeed, doing something powerful and new in my life — new commitment, new community, new ministry, new beginnings. And I was saying my own “yes” in return. In celebration of my vows, one of my sisters in community sketched the image of a woman with arms outstretched in gratitude and praise. As I stood before my community and family and friends, I felt very much like that woman and was so excited to begin to live into the newness that seemed so palpable that day. It was a time of grace and deep joy, a time of confidence in the felt presence of God in my life.

It was not, however, until a couple of years later that I paid enough attention to this all-too-familiar passage to realize that God’s promise is actually followed by a question. “I am doing something new! Now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?” It is, I believe, a genuine question, and one that invites us to respond. The newness is there, God assures us, but we may or may not see or feel it. God’s promise of newness that seemed so

obvious — so easy to perceive — when I first made my vows felt much less tangible after living for several years in the “ordinary time” of community life. Where is God’s “something new” when nothing looks or feels particularly novel? More poignantly, where is God’s “something new” in the midst of pain and uncertainty and struggle?

There are so many places in our ministry that cry out for “something new,” seemingly without a response from God — workplace violence, human trafficking, substance use disorder, the shortage of beds for patients with behavioral health issues, caregiver burnout, care for patients without legal documentation.

In that question is both an individual and collective invitation to deeper faith as members of the Catholic health ministry in 2020. In many ways, God’s “something new” is obvious — new advances in pharmacology and medical technology, new partnerships, new models of sponsorship, new payment mechanisms, new under-



standing of how deeply the social determinants of health impact the lives of our patients and communities.

And at the same time, there are so many places in our ministry that cry out for “something new,” seemingly without a response from God — workplace violence, human trafficking, substance use disorder, the shortage of beds for patients with behavioral health issues, caregiver burnout, care for patients without legal documentation.

It is our challenge as leaders to hold out both God’s promise — “I am doing something new” — and God’s question — “Do you not perceive it?” — to our colleagues across the Catholic health ministry. Can we trust that God is, indeed, doing something new, even though we may know nothing about it at the time? Can we live in the “here

but not yet” reality of God’s promise? And can we help our colleagues to do the same?

Perhaps most importantly, are we willing to allow God’s “something new” to be done not in some mysterious, far-off place, but rather to be done in us and through us each day in the care we provide for patients, families and one another? That is, I believe, the heart of Catholic health care, and it is a journey that we are blessed to take together.

SR. JENNIFER GORDON is vice president, mission integration, at Saint Joseph Hospital in Denver. Established by the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth in 1873, Saint Joseph Hospital is part of Broomfield, Colo.-based SCL Health.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

www.chausa.org

HEALTH PROGRESS®

Reprinted from *Health Progress*, January - February 2020
Copyright © 2020 by The Catholic Health Association of the United States
