



# Sponsorship Transformation at Ascension Health

**A Large System with Multiple Sponsors Takes Steps to Ensure That Its Mission is Perpetuated**



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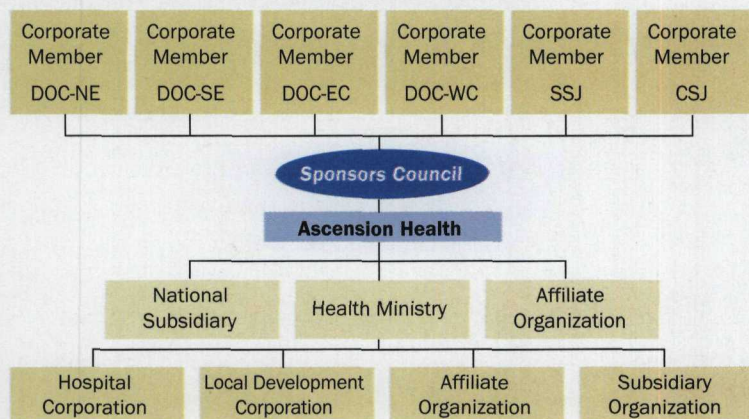
**A**dozen newly emerged butterflies were released one day in September 1999 to celebrate the formal signing of an agreement to create something new, Ascension Health, St. Louis. Two Catholic health systems, the Daughters of Charity National Health System and the Sisters of St. Joseph Health System, came together to create the system. A third organization, Carondelet Health System, then merged with Ascension Health in December 2002. (Ascension Health is sponsored by four provinces of the Daughters of Charity, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Nazareth, and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet.) The system was thus built on a strong foundation of 300 years of health care service.

The butterfly, a symbol of God's handiwork on earth, is the result of a transformation; it begins as a lowly caterpillar and becomes a beautiful creature. The symbol of the butterfly continues to inspire Ascension Health's ongoing dedication to transforming health care in keeping with the system's mission, vision, and values.

On November 1, 2005, Ascension Health celebrated six years as a vibrant ministry, united in service and healing. The six-year journey has had its challenges and triumphs, which are to be expected with any transformative process. Gratitude is owed to those who guided the system through its infancy and to those who continue to serve the system with great compassion and excellence.

In March 2005, Ascension Health also formed a steering committee to review the roles and responsibilities of the system's Sponsors Council and make recommendations for its improvement. (For the Sponsors Council, see Box, p. 27). Among other things, the committee was also asked to explore and develop recommendations concerning the addition of lay members to the council. In this article, I intend to focus on two of the committee's agenda issues, "sponsorship of the whole" and adding laity to the Sponsors Council.

## ASCENSION HEALTH ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



## SPONSORSHIP OF THE WHOLE

Ascension Health operates according to a concept it calls "sponsorship of the whole," which has been defined as follows: "The sponsors of Ascension Health exercise canonical responsibility to ensure that the health ministry sustains and strengthens Catholic identity while expressing the charisms of the present and future sponsors. The sponsors act as stewards of Ascension Health's mission and resources, and commit, in partnership with others, to educate, influence, nurture,

and develop the combined health ministry to further the healing ministry of Jesus.”

The sponsorship of the whole concept is rooted in the Guiding Principles that were developed by the steering committee that formed the system in 1999. The Guiding Principles are:

- The sponsors agreed that Ascension Health is a ministry of the church that transcends that of the sponsoring congregations/provinces.

- The sponsoring congregations and provinces delegated to the Sponsors Council their reserved powers.

- The sponsoring congregations and provinces agreed to act as one in guiding the combined, overall health ministry.

In forming the system, the sponsors cautiously embraced the idea of a combined health ministry and struggled with its implications. Of course, sponsors are more knowledgeable than others concerning their historically sponsored ministries. They have invested decades of blood, sweat, and tears in building relationships and institutions and serving communities. Their historic institutions are staffed by people with whom sponsors have journeyed through many individual and institutional hardships and successes. Sponsorship of the whole is an abandonment of those historic institutions and their associates, friends, and neighbors. Nevertheless, the strong emotional ties involved make “letting go” of traditional ways of sponsoring very difficult.

After several years of serving together on the Sponsors Council—and following much prayer, theological reflection, and in-depth discussion—the sponsors formally decided in June 2005 to accept the “Sponsorship of the Whole” document. The document challenges sponsors to open their hearts and arms to embrace all of Ascension Health’s local health ministries, which are scattered throughout 20 states and the District of Columbia.

### ADDING LAY MEMBERS TO THE COUNCIL

Since Ascension Health’s beginning, its founders have intended to expand the role of the laity in both the system’s executive leadership and its sponsorship, thereby helping ensure a Catholic health ministry in the future. In the fall of 2004, the system partnered with the Aquinas Institute of Theology, St. Louis, in launching a two-year program called “Formation for Catholic Health Care

## The Sponsors Council

Ascension Health’s Sponsors Council is a body of people appointed by the system’s sponsoring congregations and charged with acting on behalf of those congregations in exercising their rights, privileges, and obligations.

The current members of the Sponsors Council are Sr. Barbara Moore, CSJ, chair; Daniel Elsener; St. Janet Fleischhacker, SSJ; John Logue; Sr. Mary Francis Martin, DC; Sr. Honora Remes, DC; Sr. Kay Ryan, CSJ; Sr. Marie Therese Sedgwick, DC; Sr. Elyse Staab, DC; Sr. Rita Ann Teichman, SSJ.

## Responsibilities of the Sponsors Council

Ascension Health’s Sponsors Council:

- Exercises, on behalf of the members, the reserved powers set forth in the system’s bylaws
- Develops and communicates sponsors’ expectations
- Establishes criteria for, and approves the addition of, new sponsors for the system
- Approves, and ensures canonical sponsorship of, the formation or acquisition of new health ministries
- Ensures that the elements of Catholic identity—as expressed, for example, in the *Ethical and Religious Directives for Catholic Health Care Services*, Catholic social teaching, and other sources—are integrated and implemented throughout the organization; the council also receives periodic reports on the observance of these elements and takes appropriate action concerning those reports
- Establishes criteria and a process for evaluating the system and receives that evaluation
- Adopts, implements, and (from time to time) changes the competencies required of members of the boards of Ascension Health and its health ministries and subsidiary organizations
- Establishes criteria for evaluating the system’s board chair and CEO and provides input on their performances
- Establishes criteria for evaluating the board
- Establishes and approves the criteria and procedure for transferring assets and reallocating debt among health ministries
- Resolves conflicts in the event that the system fails to obtain a supermajority on the appointment of board members or on the system’s integrated strategic and financial plan
- Appoints and removes lay members of the Sponsors Council

## **Sponsors have the responsibility to act as stewards of the health care ministry's mission and resources in service to the common good.**

Ministry Leadership." As noted in an accompanying handbook, "The program seeks to develop a community of spiritually mature, vitally effective and self assured leaders who are prepared to take our ministry into the future. The program welcomes participants from diverse faith traditions who share a common goal of building a strong, vibrant ministry. Participants benefit from a thought-provoking curriculum that combines flexible, self-directed study, spiritual development and shared learning." New classes begin each year in February.

When Ascension Health was formed in November 1999, it was with the intention of adding laypeople to the Sponsors Council. In late 2005, the system created a work group to explore key areas pertinent to the appointment of lay members to the council. Those key areas, the group decided, were:

- Competencies
- Rights and duties of lay members
- Identification and selection process

- Appointment/removal
- Formation and commitment
- Timing

The Sponsors Council then engaged in a rigorous identification and selection process, after which, on July 1, 2006, it welcomed two lay members.

Ascension Health will continue to develop its own preferred culture and identity. Sponsors have the responsibility to act as stewards of the health care ministry's mission and resources in service to the common good. As the system's metamorphosis unfolds, personal conversion, a new way of relating to others, and changes in both attitudes and values will be necessary. May God give all involved the grace to respond as loving instruments, always remembering that Ascension Health's ultimate goal is a vibrant Catholic health ministry that will help lead to the transformation of health care. ✠

### **Competencies for Lay Members of Sponsors Council**

The competencies for lay members of Ascension Health's Sponsors Council were adopted December 15, 2005.

#### **Regarding the *Ministry of Sponsorship*, a lay member must:**

- Be willing to discern the call to serve on the Sponsors Council
- Know, understand, and be able to act out the mission, vision, and values of Ascension Health
- Commit to working with a group that is seeking to establish a community of sponsors
- Understand the canonical responsibilities of sponsorship
- Understand and commit to the role and responsibilities of the Sponsors Council

#### **Regarding *Catholic Health Care*, a lay member must:**

- Have knowledge of the tradition, history, and structure of the Catholic Church
- Be willing to support Catholic Church teaching relative to the health ministry (e.g., social teachings, ethics, etc.)
- Realize the complexities of health care, be appreciative of the Catholic health ministry, and be dedicated to stewarding the ministry into the future

#### **Regarding *Personal Qualifications*, a lay member must:**

- Be baptized and in full communion with the Catholic Church
- Articulate personal leadership style
- Think strategically and systemically
- Articulate his or her spirituality and participate actively in opportunities to continue his or her spiritual development
- Commit the time and effort to ongoing formation
- Be creative, innovative, visionary, and transformative
- Exemplify the basic qualities of honesty, integrity, candor, maturity, and sound character

Prospective lay members do not have to meet all of the above competencies initially; however, any prospective lay member needs to demonstrate a willingness to develop the competencies.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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Reprinted from *Health Progress*, January-February 2007  
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