

In 2003, Ascension Health, St. Louis, the largest not-for-profit health care system (as well as the largest Catholic system) in the United States, has asked all its health ministries to provide their employees with an opportunity to experience workplace spirituality. As a member of Ascension Health, St. Mary's Health System, Evansville, IN, has responded to this request with several initiatives, including the development, facilitation, and implementation of a new model for what St. Mary's calls its "Employee Renewal Day."

The Renewal Day concept is not new to St. Mary's. The system first began offering this day of spiritual formation and renewal to its employees in 1986. In the beginning, employee participation was voluntary and unpaid. Employees were strongly encouraged, but not required, to attend. However, Ascension Health's directive prompted Kathleen Korbela, president and CEO of St. Mary's Medical Center, Evansville, and Sr. Jane Burger, DC, the hospital's senior vice president of mission integration, to ask the hospital's Mission Integration Department to develop a new Renewal Day model.

The authors of this article helped develop the new model. With other St. Mary's leaders, we decided to offer the day to employees with pay, thereby encouraging 100 percent participation. The new model would be tried over a three-year period. Doing so, we felt, would allow St. Mary's to measure its progress in furthering the integration of spirituality in the organizational culture.

In organizing the model, we knew we must address several issues, including making sure that employees enjoyed the day and went home feeling refreshed, with a renewed sense of spirit. From a series of focus groups, we learned that employees would like the Renewal Day events to be held off the hospital campus. Employees also said they wanted to have fun, relax, eat good food, experience good fellowship, and learn more about the history and heritage of St. Mary's Health System. One employee suggested that the system take all its employees on a cruise. Thus the new Renewal Day theme became "Sailabration Cruise: A Day of Renewal."

St. Mary's Has a "Sailabration"

An Indiana Hospital Sets Aside a Day for Spiritual Renewal

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Four "sailors" join the Employee Renewal Day.

THE FIRST "SAILABRATION"

The first "Sailabration Cruise" was held in August 2004. It was intended to provide employees a day of spiritual formation and renewal by taking them away from the workplace for an imaginary voyage on a ship. The "ship" in this case was the conference room of the Seton Residence, which is located on the property of the Mater Dei Provincialate of the Daughters of Charity, in Evansville.

As the "passengers" arrived, they registered at the "purser's desk," where they were given a cruise booklet containing information about the "ship." Just as in boarding a real cruise ship, each participant had his or her photograph taken. Once developed, the photo was put in a special "Sailabration"

frame and given to the "passenger."

Before "setting sail," participants were greeted by Sr. Jane and Sr. Jean Maher, DC, the Daughters' provincial councillor. After that, Tony Orth, an education department employee who served as the "activities director," led participants through several get-acquainted exercises. In one exercise, he assigned participants colored candy signifying the type of "lifesaver" they are in the organization. A red piece of candy indicated work that involves *reviving*; yellow stood for *preventing* and *protecting*, green for *supporting*, white for *comforting*, and orange for *rescuing*. The exercise gave participants an opportunity to get to know each other and discover what role they play on the St. Mary's team.

Shortly before "departure," we conducted an important exercise we called an "Invitation to Leisure, Rest and Renewal." We read and reflected on two passages in the New Testament—the one in which Jesus calms a stormy sea (Mt 8:23-27) and the one in which he tells his followers, "Come to me, all of you who are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart; and you will find rest for yourselves" (Mt 11:28-29). Our "passengers" were invited to slow down, to feel God's awesome wonder, and to let the day be one of rest and renewal in body, mind, and spirit.

THE FOUR "PORTS"

After that exercise, participants were divided into four groups, which then took turns visiting four "ports of call"—the "Port of Mater Dei Provincialate," the "Port of Evansville," the

SUMMARY

Ascension Health has asked all of its health care ministries to promote spirituality in the workplace. St. Mary's Health System, Evansville, IN, responded to this request with several initiatives, including the development, facilitation, and implementation of a new model for what St. Mary's calls its "Employee Renewal Day."

Revamped from a voluntary unpaid day to a paid day on which participation is strongly encouraged, Employee Renewal Day 2004 focused on fellowship, relaxation, and the history and heritage of St. Mary's and its sponsor. Based on an employee's suggestion, the mission team

adopted a nautical theme, "Sailabration Cruise: A Day of Renewal," and took employees on "a voyage" complete with mission-themed ports, passenger photos, a ship's log, purser's desk, and an activities director.

More than 1,200 St. Mary's employees—or 23 percent of the total workforce—participated. All of St. Mary's 135 leaders were in attendance. The new Employee Renewal Day model will be tried over a three-year period, so as to measure the progress of furthering the integration of spirituality within the organizational culture.

“Port of Trust,” and the “Port of Relaxation.” Each “port” offered 50 minutes of activities involving a specific theme.

The “Port of Mater Dei Provincialate” At this stop, participants were invited to celebrate St. Mary’s rich heritage. They toured the provincialate’s offices and the Daughters of Charity archives, which gave them a sense of history of the community. They were also shown a small, log cabin chapel that many people visit for personal reflection time.

The “Port of Evansville” Here participants watched a video, “Celebrating Our Mission,” that describes how the Daughters of Charity came to Evansville and opened a hospital. The video provides an understanding of the many changes the system has undergone and of its continual growth.

The “Port of Trust” At this stop, participants paired off and led each other through a blindfolded “trust walk.” Talking was forbidden as the team member who could see guided the blindfolded member safely among various obstacles. In this way, participants celebrated each other through trust building and team building.

The four groups then discussed leadership styles, roles of leaders and followers, personal faith journeys, teamwork in health care, and the role of the health care employee in serving patients and families.

The “Port of Relaxation” At this, our most popular “port of call,” participants were taught guided-imagery exercises. A specialist offered tips on relaxation and led participants in relaxation exercises.

A CONSISTENT THEME

The “Sailabration” theme was woven into every aspect of the day—including food, decorations, and the general atmosphere—so that employees could fully enjoy the experience. A buffet lunch included a variety of foods with a nautical theme and was topped off by an ice cream sundae bar. Decorations included nautical flags; ocean murals; and faux ship railings, life preservers, palm trees, and surfboards—all of which we put together on a budget of \$600.

Participants were invited to visit the Blessing Place, the Daughters’s gift shop, and to walk the beautiful grounds or visit the chapel for a moment of personal reflection. Meanwhile, we continued to take photos of participants throughout the day. These pictures were arranged in a slide presentation and set to music as part of a

St. Mary’s Renewal Day is a means of recognizing employees.

“farewell” reception.

As participants prepared to “disembark,” the day concluded with a prayer of gratitude. In this prayer, we said how grateful we were for our health; our trust in God; our many resources; our many talents and skills; and, especially, for our ability to serve the sick, the poor, and the vulnerable.

PLANNING NEW “SAILABRATIONS”

At the end of the day, participants evaluated their experiences. We who had organized the event paid close attention to these evaluations, noting possible improvements for future Renewal Days. Overall, the event was given high marks.

More than 1,200 St. Mary’s Health System employees (23 percent of the total workforce) participated in the 2004 “Sailabration.” Among them were all 135 of St. Mary’s leaders, each of whom was determined to lead by example. We are now beginning to plan a similar event in 2005. This year, we hope to increase employee attendance by another 25 percent. In 2006, which will be our third year, our goal is to have the remaining 52 percent of employees participate in “Sailabration.”

St. Mary’s Renewal Day is a means of recognizing employees and the wonderful work they do for the health system. It is a day to celebrate the fact that our mission is truly alive within our employees. It is the organization’s way of expressing its gratitude to its employees, not just in words alone, but through a day of personal and professional growth in spirituality for each employee. ■

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