

Dreaming Together about the Future We Want



**BY ELAINE BAUER,
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In today's turbulent health care environment, many health care leaders find it hard to see their way through the current operational dust storm of regulatory requirements, time-consuming physician relationships, daunting financial conditions, threats to tax-exempt status, and labor relations issues to plan strategically for the next year, let alone the next decade. In Catholic health care, we have the added struggle of continuing the healing ministry of Jesus while dealing with challenges to our values regarding the dignity of human life in a pluralistic society and the potential federal legislative and statutory actions that could erode them. When it comes to the question of long-range planning, health care leaders usually respond like this: "There is so much uncertainty. The confluence of pending health reform, changes in the practice of medicine, and the evolution of new technologies makes the future so precarious. Why should we waste the precious time of the board and management team thinking about it, especially if we're talking about the next DECADE!"

Many books by well-known authors in business, management and organizational development disciplines devote chapter upon chapter to

the importance of strategic planning. Successful organizations attribute their success not only to excellent execution, but also to a firm under-

standing of the organization's future vision and a well thought out set of strategies that provide a roadmap for the organization to reach its vision. All too often, though, the authors' advice and the successful organizations'

track records are forgotten in the face of environmental "chaos" and disruptive events like the current economic crisis.

The value of a long-range vision (10 years or more) is that it provides a beacon to move toward, both in good times and bad, weaving together the elements that create a preferred future. Although the words themselves are often similar, the vision should not be confused with the mission statement, which describes the purpose of the organization. Once the vision is established, a strategic plan can be developed that provides specifics on how the vision will be achieved.

I liken the development of a vision and its subsequent strategies to that of preparing for a trip. I think of friends of mine who love the outdoors — hiking, camping, canoeing and wildlife viewing. They always dreamed of taking an extended trip to Alaska, but never seemed to be able to pull all of the essential elements together. One year, after a series of tragic events in their extended families, the couple decided to get serious and turn their dream — their vision — of a wilderness adventure in Alaska into reality.

First, they made a sign that they displayed prominently in their home: "ALASKA OR BUST." They set a goal of five years out — and each year deliberately saved two vacation days so that in five years they could take a month off. Each year they set aside the money they would normally spend on birthday and anniversary gifts for each other to buy the equipment they would need on the trip. Six months before the trip, they evaluated all of their transportation options and



A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

The vision will describe the preferred future for Catholic health ministry in the United States in the year 2020, in the context of what we believe the environment will be. This preferred future vision will address:

- The services that will be provided.
- How they might be organized.
- Who will be served.
- The roles of governance and sponsorship.
- Formation of lay leaders.
- Engagement of our communities in Catholic health ministry.

selected one that met their budgetary constraints and balanced their desire to see the land with the time they wanted to allocate to transit.

After returning from their trip, they observed that, had it not been for the series of events that turned their lives upside down five years earlier, they might never have actually become serious about what had until then been only a dream of seeing Alaska (their vision), set the five-year time horizon (the goal) or worked diligently to achieve their vision (the plan).

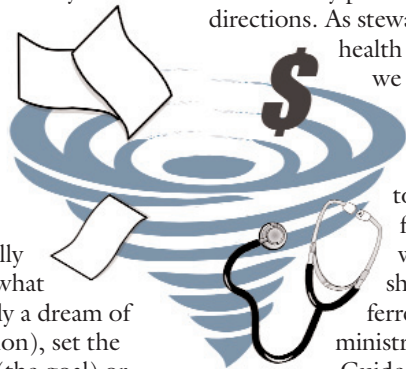
We are about to embark on a visioning process for Catholic health ministry – Vision 2020. This is not a new concept. Back in the mid-1980s, a group of forward-thinking leaders in Catholic health care came together and developed a *New Vision for a New Century* (the report is available at www.chausa.org). That process and the resulting document outlined six areas of focus for Catholic health ministry and seven strategies to achieve that preferred future. A recent review of those areas of focus indicates that most of what was envisioned has in fact been accomplished.

Learn more about Vision 2020 by visiting www.chausa.org.

In an electronic survey completed by more than 275 persons in Catholic health ministry during

June and July of this year, fewer than 50 percent of the respondents indicated that their organization has a long-range vision that extends to 2020. Just 14 percent indicated that their organization has a strategic plan for 10 years out or longer. Establishing a clear,

concise vision statement enables clarification of where we are going in the face of many possible and probable directions. As stewards of Catholic



health ministries, how can we not raise ourselves above the vortex of swirling issues we are dealing with in today's world, look forward, and create what we believe should be the preferred future for our ministries?

Guided by a steering committee, the next steps in the Vision 2020 process will include preparing an environmental scan that sets the context for the year 2020 along with development of alternative scenarios that may unfold during the next decade and their implications for Catholic health care. In the next issue of *Health Progress*, I will share and discuss the exciting environmental factors that will have an impact on health care delivery and Catholic health providers in particular.

Joel Barker once said, "Vision without action is just a dream. Action without vision just passes time. Vision with action can change the world." As we embark on creating a vision that describes the preferred future for Catholic health ministry in 2020, we invite you to be engaged with us in this essential process, enabling us to continue to meet the health needs of the poorest and most vulnerable of society across our nation. ■



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