

“How often must I forgive?”

- Mt 18:21

At the heart of Jesus’s teaching and ministry there is forgiveness. For people who are involved in continuing Jesus’s ministry, forgiveness is essential. Yet, it is ironic that in health care ministries the ability to forgive is not held up as a core business or leadership competency.

Pope Francis, in speaking with the Vatican employees and their families just before Christmas, thanked them for their work and dedication, and then he added, “I want to also ask your forgiveness for the scandals there have been in the Vatican.” He went on to ask them to pray for the people involved. Then he advised them to always make sure that in their domestic lives that any fights or arguments during the day ended in peace before bedtime. As head of the whole Church, Francis showed that forgiveness is the work of the heart and necessary for healthy relationships in organizations and in families.

Forgiveness is a holy mystery, a sacrament. It changes me and frees me, even when I want others to change. I ask myself, how much of my energy at home and work is focused on harboring and nurturing past hurts? How much of my time is wasted focusing on what others have done or should have done? Because of this focus I lose presence, quality time and productivity. The practice of forgiveness frees me from the limitations that I place on myself and allows me to live within a larger reality.

Even though forgiving may feel like losing and a show of weakness, it brings deep healing and restores my heart to its original state. It is in giving that we receive, Saint Francis of Assisi discovered. The act of forgiving is itself the gift of forgiveness. My decision to forgive is a gift I give to the other person and to me.

C. S. Lewis writes, “To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.” Forgiving then is a “must do” for all of us in the ministry of health care. We must constantly let go of old grudges and present hurts. We must both ask for and grant forgiveness. As Pope Francis said to the Vatican employees, it is necessary to learn “this wisdom of making peace.”

Where and whom do I need to forgive?

Where and of whom do I need to ask for forgiveness?