

The Corporate World and Charism

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I remember sitting around our staff table with our entire Pastoral Care Staff. It was perhaps a year after our Jesuit hospital had been sold to a 'for profit health-care corporation'. Even though we were, by contract, to be kept at a full cohort of chaplains and as a Clinical Pastoral Education center, there were several expressions of mission, tradition and history that were simply displaced as new promotional techniques were adopted. The tension for us as employees of a Catholic University who were contracted to the hospital, and the tension for myself as director of the department, was how to hold the trust of maintaining the mission and identity of this once Catholic hospital.

How could we keep the history, tradition, and focus of the hospital mission creatively alive and growing in a corporate health-care setting? This was a time of prayerful searching, painful letting go, and reaching out to form new relationships within the new corporate administration. As a staff we struggled with the reality of moving from being a high profile department with a mandate to keep the healing mission of Christ as basic to everything from administrative decisions, to patient care, to the justice involved in good employee relations; into what felt like waking up to being a group of people who had lost a right to provide a conscience for the whole. Moving from this kind of visibility to what felt like invisibility for those of us with a history here at the hospital, was a time of grief; but also came with a profound call to trust.

A new motivational system was introduced by the hospital administration that tied specific behaviors and courtesy practices to salary increases. At no time did the corporate health care world oppose the Catholic health care culture into which it had moved. It just simply had no experience of the depth of penetration the Catholic aspect of health care had within the system. Within a year the theological vocabulary of mission had evaporated from discussion, from posters, from being presented as motivation within this health care environment. To the credit of the new administration, the mission and value statements did continue to be present in the printed orientation material given to new employees. This material did articulate the Judeo-Christian roots that came with the tradition of the hospital.

As Director I felt a moral responsibility to the Jesuit mandate I had received. I was also keenly aware of the need among the pastoral staff for grounding in the healing ministry of Christ as they met patients, family and staff on a daily basis. I knew there was a call to build a relationship with the new administration. I wrestled with the deep call from within my own spirit. I knew that the grace of a grounded incarnational theology was alive within me. My own long years of formation in ministry blessed with the charism of ministry and unity would not let me rest. There had to be ways of responding to the Spirit and letting that Spirit be known and felt, not only within the Pastoral Staff, but even in the heart of a corporate health-care system.

I have wondered if without my formation as an SSND, that included the gifts of Theresa and Caroline's charism, if I would have been able to understand what was taking place: if I could have named it? Would I have trusted enough to keep calling our Pastoral Care staff forward? Could I have permitted the experience of loss and disorientation to be articulated? Could I have responded to the sincere warmth and interest of the new administration, especially that of our chief executive officer?

What ever we have lived into these past three years, the concrete ways in which we have been able to reframe and re-articulate the meaning of mission, I do feel is unique, and a gift of the Spirit. I believe that the creative fidelity of the SSND charism has quietly and unobtrusively led me and guided me as we as a staff, moved into deeper integration in the clinical services, on committees and gradually worked our way into various hospital publications.

I select this example it combines the SSND gift of creating unity and community when ministry to God's people is the passion – along with the Jesuit charism of discernment and finding God in all things.

I do believe that we will continue to be challenged in ways that call us to tell the history, that call us show how the mission continues to be alive, and to claim time – actual minutes of scheduled time – to celebrate the life of God's healing Spirit among us.