



Sharing in the Healing Ministry of Jesus

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I minister in Catholic eldercare. During this time of the pandemic, there has been criticism from many sides on what has happened in nursing homes and assisted living campuses that have been hit by the coronavirus. Unfortunately, many residents have contracted COVID-19 and too many of them have died. Families have been kept from the sides of their loved ones by regulations that are intended to preserve the physical health of the elderly, but do not allow for their emotional and spiritual health.

In my role in the corporate office of CHI Living Communities overseeing mission integration on thirteen campuses in seven states, I have had the privilege of witnessing the work of Directors of Mission Integration and Spiritual Care during this past year. Their role is to be chaplains to residents and staff while ensuring our mission and values are lived out. While the majority of our campuses were sponsored at one time by Franciscan congregations, others claim founding by the Benedictines, Little Sisters of the Poor, Presentations of the BVM, Mercy Sisters and Sisters of Charity. What we have in common is a desire to share the healing ministry of Jesus found in the Gospel.

Despite the variety of charisms, or perhaps enriched by that variety, I can see strong elements of our Franciscan heritage that these committed individuals have lived out each day, but especially during this past year.

Seeing the face of Christ in the leper

Especially last spring and summer, there was little concrete knowledge of how the coronavirus was transmitted and how best to treat it. Fortunately, science and medicine have found clearer responses to the disease, but early on, there was much fear about providing care and comfort to residents. Employees were concerned about their own health and that of their family. Some employees simply quit. Other became anxious and stressed. The mission integration leaders recognized the vulnerability of the residents and staff. Like Francis, they recognized in each person, even in those with COVID-19, Christ was present and suffering because of the pandemic. Those working in mission integration provided courageous care, faithfully coming into work, reaching out to each person as best they good, looking below the surface to see the face of Christ. As Pope Francis says in *Fratelli Tutti*, "Only a gaze transformed by charity can enable the dignity of others to be recognized..." (No. 187)

Preaching the Gospel

Because of a myriad of protocols to handle the spread of coronavirus imposed by the Center for Medicare and Medicaid as well as state and county governments, additional work was required in nursing homes and assisted living facilities. It included carrying trays to resident rooms when they could no longer eat together in the dining room, taking the temperature of each employee at the start and end of a work shift as well as helping elderly residents use iPads and iPhones to communicate with family through Zoom and FaceTime calls. Mission integration leaders stepped up to do many things not in their job description or normal line of work. They filled in at the front desk, brought fresh water pitchers to residents, wheeled residents down to visit with family through "door visits" and generally did whatever was needed. They were not able to provide

the regular presentations on our mission and core values to employees, but they lived out compassion, inclusion, integrity, excellence and collaboration in their actions. It was the strongest witness to our core values there could be.

With residents and staff having received two shots of the vaccines if they desired, and the pandemic appearing to slow down in its spread, life in senior living is beginning to return to a few things that the residents treasure. Mass is slowly being allowed in our chapels, although still with restricted numbers and no singing. Dining rooms are once again beginning to see residents seated together, although with fewer numbers at each table. Hairdressers have come back, much to the delight of the women. Everyone is still wearing masks, keeping socially distant and hand sanitizing regularly. Importantly, staff have a heightened sense of looking at each resident as a gift of God to be treasured. Mission leaders continue to preach the Gospel with no words, but with example. St. Francis and St. Clare would be proud.