



MISSION: Day by Day™

By Leadership Formation Partners
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Why Does Mission Formation Matter?

Why invest scarce resources in Mission Formation for all who work in Catholic healthcare?

We live in a world where indifference is rampant. Pope Francis coined the phrase the “globalization of indifference” to describe an increasingly widespread lack of concern toward our neighbors and toward God. In Catholic healthcare, we carry on the healing ministry of Jesus. We are in the business of providing an experience of God’s love to those who come to us for services, and we are called to see them as our brothers and sisters. This is far from indifference. In fact, it is an antidote to indifference.

How have you prepared to lead in Catholic healthcare? Did you get an MBA, go to medical school or nursing school, earn a Master’s degree in hospital or healthcare administration? How many administrators do you know who have studied theology, or placed some emphasis on continuing education to help them with the “Catholic” element in their work? Beyond those with responsibility for Mission Integration and Spiritual Care, few healthcare leaders have formally studied or prepared in this area. Thirty years ago, most hospitals were administered by religious sisters who received formative education and preparation as part of their orders’ initial training. They also spent several weeks a year in continuing education through retreats and congregational meetings. Now things are different.

Most executives and leaders in Catholic healthcare today are no longer vowed members of religious communities. We select those who have strong financial acumen, experience with payers, or the vision and ability to implement new models of collaboration while maintaining acute care. All of this – and more – is essential to the viability of healthcare in today’s environment. At the same time, it is essential that our leaders know the Catholic teachings that are the foundation of our work. They require fluency in Catholic principles to speak the language of Mission, and to integrate Gospel-based values into communications and decision-making. How else will we assure fidelity to the healing ministry of Jesus? How will we collectively, at all levels of the organization, continue to find the sacred in all things? How will we maintain our Catholic identity and ensure our accountability to Rome?

In Catholic healthcare, we are expected to integrate and manifest our Mission in all we do. Do you and all those engaged in your organization have the knowledge and experience necessary to do this? Are you – and are we all - able to pass this wisdom and ability on to future generations as effectively as the sisters and brothers who began these ministries did? That is what is required of us now, and good leadership formation equips us to honor that responsibility.

The Catholic Health Association and many Catholic health systems have spent the last 30 years preparing for the reality we find ourselves in today. To address the need created by fewer vowed religious within our organizations, they have initiated programs to prepare people at all levels -- sponsors, boards, administrators, physicians and staff -- for their responsibility to understand and to integrate Catholic Mission and tradition, and to place compassionate care at the center of all we do. We call this Mission Formation. How can someone lead in Catholic healthcare if she or he does not have the knowledge necessary to integrate Gospel values into everyday work, and organizational decision-making? The impact should be universal, ranging from strategy and planning to communications and human resource practices (e.g., candidate selection, orientation, job descriptions, evaluation, training, recognition) and more.

For example, how is Mission integrated into your candidate selection and interviewing? Does each hiring leader begin by articulating the Mission and what it means to him or her in working within your organization? Do you ask candidates to provide an example of their understanding of Mission concepts as applied in their previous experiences? Even if they have not worked before in Catholic healthcare, candidates can give examples of Mission concepts at work in other settings.

Formation is essential because the sustainability of Catholic health care depends on our ability to make Mission-driven, Gospel-based values explicit in our work. It is the responsibility of each of us to pass on the traditions of those upon whose shoulders we stand. "You may be the only Sister someone meets." Our staffs and communities, now and in the future, must know the foundational teachings and stories of those whose ministries we have inherited. We must know the significance of the Good Samaritan, or of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples, and use these as we make important decisions, and communicate our directions.

The Gallup organization researched and identified 12 areas of importance for maximizing employee engagement. The first key area was: "I know what is expected of me at work." The second was: "I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work." According to Gallup, these are the two elements upon which all other aspects of employee engagement depend. An added benefit of good formation is that it provides this foundation. Gallup research also asks, "Does the mission of my organization make me feel my job is important?" Affirmative answers here, too, are a powerful result of effective formation.

We had such an amazing group meeting. The experience was electrifying. Your tasks are bringing us all closer together. The sharing is remarkable. We are steadily making progress toward a tighter knit community of mission-driven ministry leaders.

Thanks for the guidance and support.

- Dr. Jim, Behavioral Health, Local Facilitator, Mission: Day by Day™

In Catholic health care, often we ask: what differentiates us in the marketplace? What will encourage patients to choose us beyond their health insurance? What will inspire physicians and employees to stay with us? A combination of immersion in, engagement with, and experience of the Mission at the heart of our ministry is that key differentiator.

We know that not all who work in Catholic healthcare are believers. However, Catholic understandings of human dignity, care and compassion can be universal. We invite all who have respect and affection for Gospel-based values to collaborate with us. Whatever our differences in theological belief, we who work together in Catholic health care must be immersed in, and operate from, a Catholic understanding of Mission in meeting our responsibilities every day. The sustainability of Catholic healthcare depends on our ability to make our Mission manifest through our interactions, our community, our decisions, our practices and our systems.

When patients and staff have an experience of compassionate care and authentic concern, they have an experience of God's love. If our corporate cultures are to reflect and promote this experience, then we must provide formation in all areas of ministry. Each person in our organizations must work to make our Mission real and known, and each organization must be responsible for preparing staff, at all levels, to carry on that tradition.

Beth McPherson is a dedicated and proven mission and formation leader with more than three decades of experience in developing people and structures for the future of the Catholic health ministry.

If you want to talk more about formation or are interested in learning more about Mission: Day by Day, reach out at info@lfpnow.com.