

A Spirituality for St. Bernard Hospital and Health Care Center

"Spirituality" is a common term we hear today. Often one hears another say, "I am spiritual not religious." This assumes that being spiritual or religious are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, one who is religious may have a well defined spirituality, often complex, with long historical roots.

Simply put, spirituality is identified by the relationship one has with the ultimate value one perceives for oneself. The ultimate value can be one's Higher Power, God, Jesus, Allah or it can be Wealth, Honor, Beauty, Fame, etc. Who does one bow down to? Make time for? Change one's life for? The answer to these questions is usually the ultimate value in one's life.

For example Catholics and other Christians see Jesus the Christ as the ultimate value. Therefore to develop a personal relationship with Jesus is not only essential, it is what Christian Spirituality consists of. Worship, Bible study, spiritual song and art, observing Holy Days, following the Ten Commandments, wearing Cross pendants, and the practice of virtues, e.g. "Love your neighbor as yourself," are all practices that are part of a Christian spirituality.

The founders of our hospital, the Religious Hospitallers of St. Joseph, a religious congregation of nuns (sisters) built hospitals in underserved communities as a practice of their Catholic Christian Spirituality. This spirituality is the core of the St. Bernard Hospital and Health Care Center's Mission Statement. Our hospital which means us, as we are St. Bernard, "aspires to live the healing mission of Christ." To participate in this divine healing mission is their life's work. The word "aspire" was carefully selected as it not only means 'desire,' it is derived from aspiration, which is to breathe, to inhale and exhale, to live from the center of one's being their love for God through the good works God inspires them to do.

We who are St. Bernard Hospital, its administrators, employees and contractors in the tradition of the founding sisters should likewise aspire to live this healing mission! To live it is to be recognized as a healer! Each one of us participates in the divine healing mission, therefore each of us is a healer. This is our spirituality. Whether you are employed as a nurse or in environmental services, you are essentially a healer. This is your ultimate mission. Whether you are a pharmacist or ward clerk, security or maintenance, accountant, cashier or director, you are a healer. This mission statement is your mission statement as a member of St. Bernard Hospital and Health Care Center.

Every mission has a goal. The ultimate goal for a Christian is to become one with God. This is to be intimate with God's thoughts. To view life through God's eyes and to do as God would do. Jesus said it this way, "You must be compassionate just as your Father is compassionate." (*Luke 6:36*, New Living Translation, NLT). How we treat others is the works we do. The apostle James put it this way, "I will show you my faith through my good deeds." (*James 2:18*, NLT) Our Mission Statement gives us an ongoing task through which our works may shine, "To care for the sick and promote the health of the residents of our community." We have a practical goal already established for us within this south side community of Chicago. But this goal renews every day. Each time a new patient or visitor enters the doors of St. Bernard Hospital each of us is called to respond as a 'healer,' with good deeds about to be performed!

It is important to remember that good deeds are intentional acts. Our job descriptions describe what deeds we are to perform. If we follow our job descriptions and our training we should perform our tasks in a professional manner and may well be praised for it. But there is something more when a spiritual goal is involved. One thing Jesus didn't say is, "Be professional as your Father is professional." No, rather, he called us to witness Christian values as well; that is, to be compassionate as well as professional. The same values that he gave witness to through his life, his works. If one could see Jesus at work today one would see a caring, compassionate man treating each person with dignity and respect. He is a witness to the values he taught.

But wait, one doesn't have to travel back 2,000 years in time to witness Christ's values in action. Our Mission Statement encourages us as part of our spiritual growth to embody and embrace those values here and now. We are the witnesses. When each of us performs our tasks with caring and compassion, treating those we encounter daily whether patient or visitor, co-worker or vendor with dignity and respect we are filling the world around us with the good deeds we do. We are influencing others with a divine presence that will generate even more good deeds. Compassion and caring are gifts to be shared. Dignity and respect are gifts God gave us at the dawn of creation. There are no limits to God's gifts. Neither should we hold back. One's bucket of kindness will never be empty. Just try to empty it and you will be a fountain of kindness! You are a healer! You are St. Bernard. You continue the tradition of the Sisters who brought their compassion to the new world in 1659. Their compassion is now yours.

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