

The Many Hats of a Hospitaller

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As I look back on my eighteen years of-life as a Hospitaller Brother of St. John of God, the words of St. Paul in his first Letter to the people of Corinth ring true: “There are many gifts but the same Spirit; there are many different ministries but the same Lord.”

My journey began in Waterford, Ireland, during the mid 70’s - a time of turmoil which we called the ‘troubles’. Having been exposed to the strife and bloodshed, I decided to leave home and study to become a Registered Nurse. This was not an easy decision, as I was an only son, but my parents gave me their blessings and so I went to London to commence my training. During the following three years in training, I was convinced that I had indeed found my “vocation” in life. As an R.N. I thought that I would be fulfilled. During my first position as a Staff Nurse, I began to realize that God was not really an active part of my life. With this realization, I attended a retreat at a local Benedictine Monastery. This moment opened yet another set of doors. My ‘vocation’ was being questioned and challenged. I began to ask lots of “Why” questions as I wrestled with the possibility that once again the Lord was calling me to move on. But on to what? Where?

On the advise of a wise elderly Benedictine monk, I made contact with the Hospitaller Brothers who had a General Hospital in the North of England. During the next year or so I made numerous visits to their Communities and began to accept that this was where God was calling me to. On one of my visits North, I had occasion to spend some time with several Brothers from the American Province, who were attending a Renewal Conference of the English speaking Provinces. On their invitation, I came to Los Angeles to continue exploring the possibility of joining the Province. In September 1980, I was accepted into the postulancy program, and one year later I entered the Novitiate, taking the name of Brother Richard after one of our Italian Brothers who had been beatified the same year.

I would like to think that the initial formation program was uneventful but in reality there were moments of doubt. With God’s help I completed the program and professed my first vows on Sept. 14, 1983. During the next two years, I attended Loyola Marymount College and also prepared to take the California Nursing Board Exams. In mid 1985, I became an R.N. here in California. With my license in hand I then began to minister as floor nurse, charge nurse and weekend supervisor in our Retirement and Care Center. As well as my nursing responsibilities I attended a local college and in 1988 obtained my B.S. in Healthcare Management.

The next eight years were spent in our Acute Hospital, in Apple Valley, CA. At this facility I ministered in a variety of capacities. Initially I did some intern assignments for the administrator and then was asked to become the Operations Manager for our Urgent Care Center located a few miles away from the hospital. I held this position for two years. The following year (1990) I spent some months in Bogota, Colombia, as

part of my preparation for Solemn Vows.

On my return from Bogota, I received some training and was appointed as an internal auditor at our acute facility. This position was designed to reconcile billing and medical records in events of disputes, etc. I primarily interacted with the third party insurance carriers but occasionally with the patients themselves. About two years later, I successfully applied for the position of Business Manager and was responsible to the CFO for the receivables, billing, collecting of accounts as well as the admissions office. During this time we also implemented a new in-house computer system. It was a time of challenge and growth as I struggled to balance hospitality and compassion with the need to run an efficient business office. At times it was as if I were on a tight rope wire without a safety net.

In response to the needs of the Brothers, in 1994, I relocated once again and became an Administrator-in-Training at a Care Center in the High Desert. On completion of that program, I applied for and received my Administrators License (for Nursing Homes). In late 1995, after our Provincial Chapter, I asked permission to attend a leadership program at Loreto House, back in Ireland. Having spent the past fifteen years in a variety of health care related ministries, it was a time to recharge and rejuvenate my batteries.

This year spent at Loreto House, was a time for rebuilding. It enabled me to re-focus and re-discover those gifts that were dormant inside. I recovered what I had forgotten, neglected, or was never aware of. And so I returned to the High Desert ready for anything.

After spending a few weeks adjusting back into my Community, the Provincial asked me to reflect on the possibility of moving into Vocation Ministry. In light of the rich experience at Loreto House there was no hesitation and so I said a “Yes” to his request. And again, I had to relocate. This time back to downtown Los Angeles. In some ways these two years in Vocation Ministry have been the most enriching. To be able to walk with another as they discover who they want to be has led me closer to the Lord and to myself. I have learned patience, humility and compassion as I journeyed with those men who inquired.

And now! Once again I have been asked to “shake the dust off my sandals” and move on. Following our recent Provincial Chapter, I was appointed as the Prior of our Apple Valley Community. A friend once asked me “Why do you do so many different jobs, after all you are a nurse? Why not just settle in one place?” My reply was that in my heart there is a space that allows me to be free to respond to the needs of the Community and to the needs of those we serve and minister to. This has allowed me great freedom in the service of the Lord as a Hospitaller Brother.

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