

Exploring My Poverty - a reflection on Catholic health

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Have you ever had a season where a variety of encounters become a 'connect-the-dots' that turn into a profound learning? In the span of a few short weeks I was moved by an amazing song, cared for a sick daughter, and challenged by an amazing story. That has been my fall, and I'm entitling it.. "exploring my poverty."

Now, I realize that with a headline like that, I may be attracting a readership anxious to hear my profound thoughts on the eradication of poverty. This is not that. In fact, I will invite you to embrace your poverty. Read on, and see if the dots connect for you as well.

Dot #1: On Sunday, October 14th, I attended the Compassionate Healers Mass in Prince Albert. This would be one of three annual diocesan gatherings that CHAS coordinates and promotes to celebrate Christ our Healer. The St. Mary High School Choir was there to offer music ministry, and one of the songs they sung - *Break My Heart* - really moved me. As they sang the refrain over and over again, I thought... wow, that really is the essence of Catholic health care.

Dot #2: My eldest daughter graduated high school in the spring, moved in to an apartment with a roommate, and started her first year engineering at the U of S. After about 8 weeks of swimming in the deep end, the inevitable happened... a head cold. A bad head cold. She's a trooper, but after about 10 days, she was totally sick of being sick. Haven't we ALL been there? On Halloween night, two days before our provincial conference was to start (and with many things left on the to-do list), I found myself making chicken noodle soup for her in her apartment. And not because she was bed-ridden, or incapable of cooking for herself... but because I REMEMBERED what it was like to be away from home, and in that place of being sick.

Dot #3: Carol Taylor from Georgetown University was the guest speaker at the W. F. Mitchell Bioethics Seminar in Saskatoon. She is a wonderful speaker, and took us on a journey of celebrating ethics in professional practice. One story she told stuck in my head - a true story of a prominent leader in a prestigious university who contracted ALS disease. Having been defined by position and status, this woman found herself on a path of declining ability and health. By the time she needed full nursing care, her status had dwindled, and her notable identity had become unrecognizable. One day, when a care aide asked, "and who are you?" her reply was simply..."I am who YOU decide I am." Her point was clear - if you decide I am just a piece of meat, that is what I'll be. That is what I'll start to believe and become. Gulp.

Break my Heart

REFRAIN (only):

For the sick, for the poor,
for the ones who need more
tenderness and justice,
break my heart.

For the lost, for the lame,
for those suffering in pain,
help me see You in each face
through a broken heart.

Daughters of God, Songs from the Heart (2012)

So this is my profound learning, and ultimately my prayer, as I connected the dots to explore my own poverty: Lord, break my heart and cause me to remember my own weak and fragile state. I am a caregiver (by virtue of being a mother, daughter, sister), and I have the power to offer dignity and define another when they are weak and fragile. And some day, when my identity and position seem to be waning, I hope to receive the same.

We are all caregivers. In Catholic health care, we know our best care comes from knowing our own poverty, and appreciating our own fragility. And in faith, we attempt to treat others as though they were Christ himself.