



National Catholic Health Care Week

Daily Reflections and Prayers

National Catholic Health Care Week (Sunday, February 4 to Saturday, February 10, 2024) recognizes the mission of Catholic health care organizations across Canada.

This year, we focus on the theme of “Signs of Hope,” which speaks to the courageous gift of Catholic health as a sign of hope in the world and offers words of blessing and hope to each person in their journey to care for themselves or others. It acknowledges and responds to the challenges faced in our communities as we continue our journey of recovery as a society and as Catholic health from the effects of the global pandemic.

As we carry on the healing ministry of Jesus, we are encouraged by Pope Francis to take up and create paths of hope. Daily reflections and prayers follow.

Hope

I invite everyone to renewed hope, for hope “speaks to us of something deeply rooted in every human heart, independently of our circumstances and historical conditioning. Hope speaks to us of a thirst, an aspiration, a longing for a life of fulfillment, a desire to achieve great things, things that fill our heart and lift our spirit to lofty realities like truth, goodness and beauty, justice and love... Hope is bold; it can look beyond personal convenience, the petty securities and compensations which limit our horizon, and it can open us up to grand ideals that make life more beautiful and worthwhile”.

Let us continue, then, to advance along the paths of hope. (55)

Pope Francis
Fratelli Tutti (October 2020)

The ultimate goal of our care is to give those who are ill a reason to hope.

Although illness brings chaos and undermines hope in life, we seek to comfort those who are ill, whether or not they can be physically cured. We do so by being a sign of hope so that others may live and die in hope.

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin
A Sign of Hope: A Pastoral Letter on Healthcare (October 1995)



National Catholic Health Care Week

Monday, February 5

Signs of Hope: Human Connection

In everyone's life, at some time, our inner fire goes out. It is then burst into flame by an encounter with another human being. We should all be thankful for those people who rekindle the inner spirit.

Albert Schweitzer

The COVID-19 pandemic shone a public light on what's at the heart of our Catholic ministry: human dignity, compassion, the importance of human connection, and the meaning of wellbeing—body, mind and spirit.

As people with a mission to concretely share the healing love of God, we are called to signs of hope and compassion in a hurting post-pandemic world, where increasing numbers of people face isolation and loneliness and so many bend under the burdens of stress, fatigue, anxiety and depression.

As signs of hope, we are called to reconnect the broken pieces--to heal the hurts, mend the rifts and traverse the barriers we encounter between each other as people, and in our communities, our social and health systems and our society.

Those who study hope say it is not something you can build or borrow. It is something we have to experience or awaken through human connection and compassion. Human connection has been recognized in nursing, education, spirituality and psychology as important to cultivating hope. Communication is key: being explicit about hope, sharing why we need it, when we feel we've lost it and how we might find it again. To be heard and understood opens the door.¹

As we move on from a prolonged experience of distance and barriers, let's renew our focus on reaching out, sparking life-giving connections in our lives, so that no one is ever left behind or without hope.

Let us reflect

1. How have the past years of the pandemic impacted your ideas about hope?
2. In our experiences of illness or caregiving, how might we spark or nurture hope through our human interactions?

Let us pray

Loving God,
In difficult and lonely times,
you do not leave us to fend for ourselves,
but invite us into community with you and each other--
heard, seen, understood, welcomed.
Knit us together
as companions in this beautiful mission
to see love, peace, and hope made known.
Amen.

¹ Adapted from "[Hope is an Overused Word, But the Real Thing Can be Powerful](#)," Amie Filkow, *newtrail*, University of Alberta (May 25, 2020)



National Catholic Health Care Week

Tuesday, February 6

Signs of Hope: Belonging and Community

Human life is not meant to be lived in isolation. To be fully human, we must live in community. We strive through our hospitality to give people the strength, comfort and consolation of hope.

Joseph Cardinal Bernardin (1995). A Sign of Hope: Pastoral Letter on Healthcare

Our Catholic tradition teaches us that each of us is not only sacred, but social. We hope to find fulfillment, a sense of belonging and purpose, in our association with others—and in the ways that we organize ourselves as a society to foster growth, protect dignity and the promote the common good.

Along with communities and many different partners, Catholic health works to achieve a Canadian society that reaches out to every person who is suffering from illness, stigma, poverty or loneliness. As we work together for a just society, the problems and situations we encounter are complex and often heartbreaking.

Pope Francis encourages all of us—in whatever work we are called to do—to nurture and share the hope with in us each day as a healing force for community.

“We all need each other. None of us is an island, an autonomous and independent “I,” separated from the other,” he said. “We can only build the future by standing together, including everyone. A single individual is enough for hope to exist, and that individual can be you. And then there will be another *you*, and another *you*, and it turns into an *us*. And so, does hope begin when we have an *us*? No. Hope began with one *you*. When there is an *us*, there begins a revolution.”²

In doing so, we come together as members of the human family—a family interconnected and interdependent—seeing ourselves in each other. With eyes and hearts open, may we step into the uncomfortable spaces and the possibilities.

Let us reflect

1. When have you seen hope spread person to person and what was the result?
2. What does “sharing hope” look like to you?

Let us pray

Spirit of God,
Inspire us to hope,
Enable us to tend the seeds of hope in ourselves,
That we may be sowers of hope
in our human family--
one sacred moment and interaction at a time.
Amen

² [“Why the Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone,”](#) Pope Francis, TED 2017, Vancouver, April 25, 2017



National Catholic Health Care Week

Wednesday, February 7

Signs of Hope: Compassion and Healing

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand.

Henri Nouwen

In the Catholic tradition, we understand human life as the integration of body, mind and spirit and see each person as a unique and sacred with intrinsic dignity and worth. Healing touches all dimensions of being human—and encompasses the whole person in their search for meaning, health, wholeness and well-being.

The poet Stephen Levine observed that “to heal is touch with love that which we previously touched with fear.” Compassion—to endure with others and encounter and walk with suffering—is at the heart of healing, for ourselves and with the people we love and care for.

Compassion is central to hope. “We are all fragile and vulnerable, and need that compassion which knows how to pause, approach, heal, and raise up,” writes Pope Francis in his Message for the World Day of the Sick 2023. In his writings on hope, Pope Francis describes compassion as a living act of love and service: “A word, a caress, but given from the heart; this is compassion for the one who needs comfort and consolation. This is more important than ever: Christian hope cannot do without genuine and concrete charity.”³

Walking with others is a journey of openness, learning and action. It calls us to seek out and draw on tradition, language, ways of knowing and healing practices that foster connection, kinship, relationship and community. It calls us to create sacred space in our care environments, our communities and in ourselves for all to find healing and hope.

Let us reflect

1. What does compassion that “knows how to pause, approach, heal and raise up” mean to you? Which of these characteristics of compassion resonate most with you and why?
2. What concrete actions can we take to create sacred space for healing and hope?

Let us pray

Loving God,
Open our eyes that we may see you in all our sisters and brothers.
Open our minds that we may understand their hopes and dreams,
their sorrows and pain, their longing.
Open our hearts to give generously of ourselves.
Grant us wisdom to respond effectively with grace and compassion.
Give us the courage to speak and act
in true peace, love, mercy and human solidarity.
Amen

³ [Catechesis on Hope](#), Pope Francis, 2016-17



National Catholic Health Care Week

Thursday, February 8

Signs of Hope: Well-being

Perhaps you have to have a little bit of hope to believe that beauty can be found, to believe that life does come back, that something can surprise you. And maybe hope and wonder are somehow related. Maybe wonder feeds hope and hope feeds wonder. You see something beautiful and it reminds you that it's possible to see something beautiful.

Jamie Tworkowski, *If You Feel Too Much* (2015)

The World Health Organization defines well-being as encompassing quality of life, as well as the ability we have to contribute to the world in accordance with our sense of meaning and purpose. In Catholic social teaching, human development includes the wellbeing of each person, encompassing the health, economic, spiritual and social dimensions of life.

Across Canada, Catholic health works with many partners to address complex system and social challenges, drawing on gospel values and a legacy of innovation. Committed to social justice, we are called to bring together the health and social supports Canadians need to live and age well in community. This is a mission of hope--a powerful force in individual well-being and human flourishing.

Pope Francis reminds us that hope cannot be optimistically naïve nor dismissive of the brokenness we encounter in our world. Instead, "Hope is the virtue of a heart that doesn't lock itself into darkness, that doesn't dwell on the past, does not simply get by in the present, but is able to see a tomorrow."

"Hope is the door that opens onto the future. Hope is a humble, hidden seed of life that, with time, will develop into a large tree. It is like some invisible yeast that allows the whole dough to grow, that brings flavor to all aspects of life."⁴

Let us reflect

1. In what ways has your organization or community worked to help people flourish?
2. In our care and interactions, how might we help others to be "able to see a tomorrow"?

Let us pray

To the One who created us,
and who teaches us to love, and who walks with us.
Fan the flame of hope that has been given us
Help us to gain new strength and certainty
By looking to the future
with an open spirit and trusting heart.
May we learn from wonder and nurture astonishment.
May we live, love, dream, believe,
and, with the Grace of God,
flourish and grow.

Amen

⁴ "Why the Only Future Worth Building Includes Everyone," Pope Francis, TED 2017, Vancouver, April 25, 2017



National **Catholic Health Care** Week

Friday, February 9

Signs of Hope: Meaning and Purpose

The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet. Your vocation in life is where your greatest joy meets the world's greatest need.

Frederick Buechner

As people who share in a mission of health and healing, we see our work and efforts to care for others as a calling—a profound sense of purpose and privilege to serve others, especially those who are most in need. We are united in a passion to make the world a better place, where everyone finds belonging, dignity and worth.

A strong sense of purpose and a belief that we are making a positive impact on people's lives and the good of the whole community are so important to our fulfillment and well-being—both as individuals and as community. This conviction grounds us and provides the glimmers of hope we need when our efforts become overwhelming, frustrating or exhausting.

In the messiness of living and striving, theologian Frederick Buechner offers inspiration to help us find meaning in the sacredness of our lives and purpose: "Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it, because in the last analysis all moments are key moments, and life itself is grace."

Let us reflect

1. How is your sense of purpose shaped by the world's deep hunger?
2. What helps you connect to meaning and purpose in times of frustration or exhaustion, boredom or pain?

A Blessing

by John O'Donohue

May the light of your soul bless your work with love and warmth of heart.

May you see in what you do the beauty of your soul.

May the sacredness of your work bring light and renewal

to those who work with you

and to those who see and receive your work.

May it never exhaust you.

May it release wellsprings of refreshment, inspiration and excitement.

May the day never burden.

May dawn find hope in your heart, approaching your new day with dreams, possibilities and promises.

May evening find you gracious and fulfilled.

May you go into the night, blessed, sheltered and protected.

May your soul calm, console and renew you.⁵

⁵ "For Work," *To Bless this Space Between Us*, John O'Donohue, 2008