15 Catholic Housing Communities go Smoke Free

In the last decade, smoke-free multi-unit housing across the country has increased dramatically as a result of mounting data and awareness of the hazards and dangers of smoking and second hand smoke.

Since the summer of 2012, Juana Mejia, Director of Catholic Housing Management and her staff have been working diligently on a program that would turn our 15 HUD subsidized communities for the low-income independent elderly into smoke free living environments. She worked with numerous tireless partners who helped her throughout the long and challenging road to smokefree policy implementation. Among those partners was Matthew Competiello, program manager for the American Lung Association. Matthew helped organize a dynamic task force and put in place a plan that included tenant surveys, staff training, policy writing consultation, smoking cessation classes, announcements and acted as a valuable liaison between various agencies and other interested parties and advocates.

“In early 2012, the Broward Regional Health Planning Council was awarded a grant by the Centers of Disease and Control (CDC) to work on community transformation in Broward County. This is no small feat. Broward was 1 of only 20 communities across the country to be chosen as recipient of funding by the CDC to work on community transformation.” Matthew Competiello shares, “Interestingly enough, the funding is tied into the Affordable Care Act’s preventive health measures. With these funds, the Broward Regional Health Planning created the Transforming Our Community’s Health (TOUCH) initiative to oversee all projects related to the grant.”

Among the first steps in the initiative was conducting an internal management overview on the topic and then a subsequent tenant survey, which was accomplished with the assistance of Dr. Nicole Cook, Nova Southeastern University, who led the project. The results were beyond validating and gave the team the data necessary to design the campaign addressing the Catholic Housing Management community at large. Over three quarters of the tenants throughout the system supported an indoor smoke-free policy and forty percent of tenants who currently smoked were also in favor of an indoor smoke-free environment!

With this encouraging news in hand, the team, together with the Property Managers and staff Social Service Coordinators, planned their next steps for smoking cessation. It was at this juncture that everyone’s confidence was strengthened thanks to the level of participation and commitment. Sheri Schour and Claud Mehu from Nova-Area Health Education Center were the lead persons on establishing the free, smoking cessation programs throughout the 15 communities, quite a sizeable task!

Valencia Morris from the Florida Department of Health at Miami-Dade County and her counterpart in Broward, Sahyli Alvarez-Vera, together provided amazing support and were involved with the policy implementation process from the beginning. Their hard work and enthusiasm spilled over the edges!

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“The American Lung Association congratulates Catholic Housing Management in their decision to adopt a smokefree policy. I echo the Surgeon General in stating that tobacco smoke is more than a nuisance. It is a severe health risk to everyone with lungs. From fire risk to health hazard, it is clear that the only way to be protected from tobacco smoke is to live in a smokefree environment. I furthermore would like to thank each of our partners for their involvement with the process as well as the diligent and assertive management team of each community for their efforts. This pathway of implementing the smokefree policy is a shining example to the rest of South Florida on how to ‘change lives one breath at a time’,” comments Compitello.

None of this could have been done without the support of Armando Fana, HUD-Miami Field Office Director with whom Juana maintains a solid working relationship for so many operational concerns in all our HUD subsidized properties. Armando assisted in the legal aspects along with CHS counsel to make the document changes necessary establishing the smoke-free policy for all present and future tenants.

“Over 2,500 seniors live in our housing communities, now they will live healthier, more carefree and safer lives. We, as a management company take the responsibility for the health, safety and welfare of each of the residents in our communities very seriously. We feel that we have added an important dimension of comfort and higher quality of life to all the residents, their families and our staff. And now we all breathe a lot easier!” shares Juana Mejia, Director, CHM.

Why we did it….
Second hand smoke is a significant cause of disease and premature death. Eliminating smoking indoors is the only way to fully protect nonsmokers from secondhand smoke. Public opinion surveys indicate smokefree policies enjoy wide support among multi-unit housing residents. Smoking-related fires are the leading cause of fire deaths, and account for 17% of fire deaths in residential buildings. In addition to protecting residents and employees from second-hand smoke, smokefree policies create healthy environments that encourage people who smoke to quit or attempt to quit.
Mr. Charles Devenny was an avid bicyclist whose love for cycling even led him to ride his bike to work over 45 minutes each way and ultimately giving up his car.

His life abruptly changed in 2011 when he was struck by a car as he rode his bicycle in Miami. Charles’ condition after the accident was so critical that he was hospitalized for multiple injuries for several months. When he awoke from a coma, he realized that his life as he had known it had forever changed. He, for the most part, was now dependent upon others for his most basic needs. Bedbound and immobile for several months, Charles ended up at Villa Maria Nursing Center in June 2013. His will just about broken and his independence stripped completely, Charles relied on others to move in bed, transfer and because of his injuries was even unable to propel a wheelchair.

Over the course of a couple months, Charles slowly regained his mobility, strength and outlook on life. Within a month, he was able to get into and out of bed by himself. In therapy he learned to propel himself in the wheelchair even with his physical limitations. So relieved with the new sense of freedom, Charles began taking “laps” around the facility counting to himself to time his pace. His therapist taught him to monitor his heart rate and oxygen so that he could exercise safely.

As his strength and endurance began to improve, the therapist determined that it was safe to try to stand. Standing with complete assistance in a body-weight supported harness, Charles struggled to relearn to stand. He and his physical therapist, Dr. Cydne Fuller, worked day in and day out until eventually he could stand in a walker. Working hard with his therapist for 3 months, Charles began to walk. His mobility continued to improve leading him to independence in bed mobility, transfers and walking with a walker. Later he began negotiating curbs, ramps and stairs. Working together with the team of social workers, therapists, nurses and physicians at Villa Maria Nursing Center, Charles was finally cleared to go home. And he did so with a renewed sense of self, independence and freedom.
450 CHS Walkers!

Each making a difference by their presence and dedication!
What an amazing turn out for the 2013 Walk to END Alzheimer’s!

As healthcare providers and family members we know what a devastating disease Alzheimer’s is and how it affects every member of a family. It is important that as a strong group, Catholic Health Services show the community that we care, that we are working with victims of this disease every day and that we stand together in the overall effort to find a cure!

Kudos and Honors to Centro Mater

The South Florida Hispanic Chamber of Commerce selected Centro Mater as the Chamber’s 2013 Non-Profit Organization of the year. The award recognizes Centro Mater as one of the most important organizations supporting the children of Miami-Dade.

“The vision, commitment, leadership and extraordinary staff of Centro Mater shine very much and are what makes this organization a wonderful one,” remarked Liliem M. Lopez, President/CEO of SFLHCC.

The award was presented to Abilio Rodríguez, Executive Director of Centro Mater at the Chamber’s Annual Sunshine Awards ceremony on November 1st.
The Sanctuary of Lourdes in France is one of the most visited Marian Sanctuaries in the Western Hemisphere. This Sanctuary was built in the same place where our Lady, the Virgin Mary appeared to a poor peasant girl, Bernadette de Soubirous in February 11, 1858. Bernadette was later canonized as a saint and the Roman Catholic faithful and some Protestants believe the apparitions have been validated by the overwhelming popularity and evidence of healings claimed to have taken place at the Lourdes water spring. Some of those healings have been declared Miracles by the Catholic Church.

A Marian apparition is a supernatural appearance by the Blessed Mother Virgin Mary. The apparition is often named after the town where it is reported, or on the name given to the Virgin on the occasion of the apparition. Apparitions have been interpreted as theophanies. The Marian Apparitions sometimes are reported to recur at the same site over an extended period of time, and in the majority of them only one person or few people report having witnessed the apparition.

In 1862 Pope Pius IX authorized Bishop Bertrand-Severe Laurence to permit veneration of the Blessed Virgin at the Grotto of the apparitions. The Marian title of Our Lady of Lourdes has been widely accepted, reported and displayed in shrines and homes all over the world. Lourdes is indeed a very special Sanctuary not only for the number of pilgrims that visit this Holy Place, over 7 million reported last year, but it is special because the spiritual reassurance and nourishment experienced by Catholics and non-catholic pilgrims. It is appropriate to mention that among the pilgrims are a large number of non-Christians and even some visitors that claim to be non-believers at all. The Sanctuary belongs to the Dioceses of Tarbes-Lourdes, France.

One of the most distinguish characteristics of Lourdes is the fact that the services and the attention provided to the pilgrims and specially to the many thousands of disabled and sick visitors, are offered by Volunteers coming from all nations that make a commitment to serve at least one week per year. Personally I had an unforgettable lesson of this selfless love when a young man that was partially incapacitated in a car accident and was preparing himself to be taken into the bath. Instead of praying for his own healing he prayed, in a loud voice, for those disabled people that have no faith or hope. The Volunteer Service Ministry has been in service in Lourdes for over 60 years, and famous volunteers like the late Princess Grace of Monaco, and several other members of the Royalty of Europe have served as volunteers.

Obedience and simplicity are the characteristics of the Volunteer Service Division of Lourdes. All persons with a sincere desire to assist those in need are invited to offer their time, talent and treasure in the
service of others. To better understand the significance of 
the visit to Lourdes and other Marian Sanctuaries is impor-
tant to understand that a “Pilgrimage” is not just a vacation 
trip, it is a “journey toward the Lord.” It is not a destination, 
but it is a process that should lead to spiritual growth. 
A pilgrimage is not just time off but a journey that 
takes the pilgrim to a deep experience of the Kingdom 
promised by God to mankind.

Lourdes also differs from other Marian Sanctuaries because 
it is only there were the faithful are invited by our Mother 
the Virgin Mary to “Come to bathe and drink from the 
fountain” that flowed during one of the apparitions to 
Bernadette. This water is special and it is used by the 
pilgrims to bathe in it. Many miracles have taken place 
in the “Piscinas” but the real purpose of the water is to 
remind us of the waters of our Baptism.

**Some Interesting Statistics of Lourdes:**

- **Extension of the Sanctuary:** 51 hectares 
  (or 125 acres)
- **Official languages:** French, Italian, Spanish, 
  English, Dutch, German
- **Number of pilgrims since the opening of the 
  Sanctuary:** 200 Million
- **Average number of pilgrims that bathed in the 
  Piscinas:** 350,000
- **Number of places to worship:** 22
- **Average number of Masses celebrated daily:** 33
- **Lighting of candles:** 800 tons of wax used a year to 
  make the candles lighted by the pilgrims
- **The water in the “Piscinas”** has a temperature of 
  54 F. grades (12 grades Centigrade)
- **Underground Basilica of St Pius X can hold 25,000 
  worshipers and park 380 wheelchairs and/or 
  stretchers**
- **A hospital to assist the pilgrims inside the 
  Sanctuary was opened in 1966**
- **The small city of Lourdes obtains its livelihood from 
  the millions of visitors. Not a single business store 
  or vendor is inside the Sanctuary**
- **Keeping the average proportions of population 
  Lourdes is, after Paris, the city that has the largest 
  numbers of hotels in the world.**
- **Official internet page:** [https://en.lourdes-france.org](https://en.lourdes-france.org)

*Note: Statistics from World Encyclopedia.*

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**Villa Maria gains ACHA Recognition**

Villa Maria Skilled Nursing Facility earned the 
(AHCA) American Health Care Association’s 
Tier 4 recognition for achieving Quality Initiatives 
goals in: safely reducing hospital readmissions; 
increasing staff stability; increasing customer 
satisfaction; and safely reducing the off-label 
use of anti-psychotics.

The management and staff’s commitment to 
quality, demonstrated by their attainment of the 
Quality Initiative goals is to be commended and 
celebrated! These accomplishments make a significant 
improvement in the lives of the individuals 
we serve and is what the Quality Initiative is 
ultimately about. “It marches in tune with the 
Catholic Health Services’ Mission and dedication 
to providing a Higher Quality of Life!” remarked 
James Reiss, Executive Director of Villa Maria. 
“Congratulations again, for your extraordinary 
efforts in meeting measurable targets! Your 
achievement inspires others and invigorates our 
work here at AHCA,” comments Dr. David 
Gifford, MD, MPH, AHCA Senior VP of 
Quality and Regulatory Affairs.
HOPE LOVE & DEDICATION

When I first came to work at St. Catherine’s West Rehabilitation Hospital 5 years ago, something touched my heart profoundly. A day before the grand opening, a group of more than 25 employees met in the Rehabilitation Gym and our administrator, Jaime Gonzalez, called for a prayer. A PRAYER? We formed a circle and while holding hands we invoked the presence of the Lord and asked for guidance in this new endeavor. I couldn’t believe it! God had given me a gift, not a job; working in a place where he would be the model to follow.

And being so, God started to bring people from all countries and all walks of life. Our mission has been to heal the sick, to help the less fortunate, but my co-workers came with more than a resume or a good reference; they came with the LOVE necessary to get a blanket for a patient that seems to be cold, to give them a hug or a kiss when they cry because they don’t remember where they are or when they think they won’t get any better.

DEDICATION to stay extra hours talking to a family under stress and feeling lost, working hard to keep their rooms and common areas spick and span for their enjoyment, dedication to advocate for our patients to stay with us longer, because the insurance wants to send them home that day.

LOVE to come up with a joke, to get a smile when they are hurting and HOPE to tell them that everything will be alright. And in this giving process, day after day, we’ve become a family who shares those fruits of the spirit among ourselves. We are definitely not perfect but I know in my heart that at the end of our working day, even when we all feel tired, on our way home, our hearts are smiling in satisfaction and the good Lord fills them up one more time with HOPE, LOVE and DEDICATION.

I hope we all can do what Jesus expects from us: “Return home and tell bow much God has done for you.” Luke 8:39.

May You and Your Family Have a Blessed Christmas Season!

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