

“Return to me with your whole heart; ... rend your hearts, not your garments.”

- Joel 2: 12-13

The words of the prophet Joel eloquently summarize the goal and the process of life—whole-hearted living that returns me to God. This encounter always invites me to deep change, to rend my heart, not just my garments. It may be painful, but a true change of the heart moves me closer to God and connects me with others. The encounter with God opens me to a deeper sense of humility and gratitude.

Garments symbolically refer to what is external, observable and easily measured or judged. Changing my outer self provides immediate results—but often with fleeting satisfaction and separation from others. In most of our lives we spend more time and energy on our outer selves than on the inner work of changing our hearts.

In Catholic health care, a change of heart is the core issue for patients and for caregivers. Whatever our roles, we are caregivers in one way or another.

For the patient, sickness afflicts the body *and the heart*. Patients come seeking immediate relief for their physical afflictions, their outer garments, yet they also need solace for their hearts.

Working in the health ministry, also, is a matter of the heart. It is more than managing technical protocols or attaining goals. If I exclusively focus on the tasks for the “changing of garments,” I may miss seeing what is in the heart of another and in my own. My role requires me to act quickly and to look deeply—to see into the hearts of those I encounter, mindful of my own heart as well.

Beginning with my own heart, the following questions may be a good place to start.

How do I relate to my heart?

Am I being and becoming the person God created me to be?

How is my life an invitation to return to God?