

Language of the Heart:

The Intersection Between Spiritual Care and Language Services

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INTRODUCTION

“Listen ... and incline the ear of your heart.” — The Rule of St. Benedict, attributed to Italian saint and monk, St. Benedict of Nursia

Inspired by this guiding principle, Catholic health care recognizes that whole-person care must include the practice of listening with the “ear of our heart” to the experiences of those we serve. Speaking and listening in the preferred language of our patients and families demonstrates respect for the diversity of voices, contributes to overall healing and underscores the centrality of human dignity. One important example in which whole-person care is essential is when chaplains and interpretation services colleagues partner on patient care.

Chaplains engage in conversations that address the clinical, spiritual and emotional needs of patients and families. When tending to patients whose primary language is other than English, chaplains often rely on medical language interpreters.

For these patients, it is vital that their whole-person caring involves the opportunity not only to express themselves fully, but also to feel understood by the clinical team. Using an individual’s preferred language allows patients to feel more authentically seen and acknowledged, and it enables fuller expression and recognition of how their spirituality and care are connected.

FLOURISHING IN SELF AND OTHERS

“I came so that they might have life and have it more abundantly.”
(John 10:10)

In partnership with its members, CHA continues to deepen its understanding of its vision statement: We will empower bold change to elevate human flourishing. While the linguistic and theological underpinnings of “flourishing” have been explored, the Spanish translation, *florece*, offers nuance that is difficult to capture in English. While *florece* literally translates “to flourish,” it is most often used to refer to flowers that bloom. When a flower blooms, it is said, “La flor florece,” which means, “The flower flourishes.”

Consider all that is required for a flower to bloom, to *florece*: rich soil to ground its roots, sunshine and water to nourish it, and a caretaker to ensure it gets what is required.

- How does *florece* play out in your own life?
- When have you witnessed a patient’s flourishing? What did you notice?
- How do you contribute to the flourishing of others so that all may *florece*?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

As we support the spiritual flourishing of patients whose preferred language extends beyond English, ponder these questions:

- In your ministry, how can you advocate for greater equity and

access to language services? What patient care outcomes could improve?

- What role might ministry formation have in offering formative opportunities for employees and contracted language services partners?
- How might we better collaborate with our language services partners?

BLESSING FOR LANGUAGE SERVICES COLLEAGUES

Our patients, families and associates benefit from the skills, dedication and experience our colleagues in language services bring to our ministries. As you encounter these colleagues and partners, consider offering these or other words of affirmation:

You are a blessing.

You comfort in a way no other team member can, simply by speaking in words that patients and families can understand.

You listen to the hearts of our most vulnerable and advocate for their needs.

You distill the complex into the understandable so that the care team can provide tailored and effective care.

You are essential to our team’s ability to connect and overcome loneliness, uphold dignity and foster healing and hope for our patients and families.

You are a vital contributor to our flourishing.

Thank you for the blessing you are to us this day and always.

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