

## **In the Heartland**

### **Vatican Officials Visit Mercy Medical Center and Mercy College of Health Sciences September, 2010**

Archbishop Zygmunt Zimowski, President of the Pontifical Council for Health Care Workers, was the guest of the Diocese of Des Moines August 30<sup>th</sup> to September 1<sup>st</sup>. He was accompanied by Monsignor Charles Namugera, originally from Uganda, who has served at the Pontifical Council for eight years coordinating relationships with English speaking countries.

Healthcare along with education are two ministries that are at the core of the Church's commitment to uphold the life and dignity of the human person. It is typical for the Catholic Church to establish healthcare facilities and schools in its outreach of evangelization which then evolve into established institutions serving the community.

The Archbishop and Monsignor were on their way to Omaha for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pope Paul VI Institute under the leadership of Dr. Thomas W. Hilgers. They were interested in seeing first hand a thriving American hospital operation and an educational institution devoted to preparing healthcare workers with the best scientific and technology information available operated within the framework of Catholic values and tradition.

Archbishop Zimowski emphasized the centrality of the patient in healthcare by choosing to visit several in the different units of the hospital. One visit was to a 98 year old woman experiencing heart failure. She enthusiastically greeted the Archbishop informing him that she had never met a bishop much less an Archbishop before! She further assured him, that if she gets her way, she is determined to live to a hundred.

The second patient of particular note was a six month old boy, that is six months from the moment of conception. He was the size of a large coke bottle and so very tenderly cared for by an attentive nursing staff. The 98 year old and this tiny individual were tangible examples of how the Church cares for the most vulnerable in our midst – including those at both ends of life's spectrum.

In his remarks at Mass at Mercy Hospital East, the Archbishop paid tribute to the Sisters of Mercy who established the original hospital in Des Moines in 1893. Their mission was one of compassion bringing the healing ministry of Jesus to the suffering and sick. Their modest beginnings have developed into twelve different institutionalized operations embracing such initiatives as Mercy Clinics, 16 managed rural hospitals, Mercy College, Mercy Hospice, House of Mercy, etc.

The Mercy Medical Center staff provided the Archbishop and other guests at a luncheon with an update on the current status of healthcare reform in the United States. In the evening four staff doctors made presentations on the present and future developments in their respective specializations as they are situated within the Catholic tradition. Highlighted in these presentations was the fact that Iowa is ranked at the top in terms of quality of healthcare which is delivered among those states where the cost is least. Exemplifying continued commitment to charity and generous service to all, especially the poor, the Mercy network provided charity services in amounts totaling \$55.59 million dollars in fiscal year 2009.

Archbishop Zimowski and Monsignor Namugera spent their second day in Des Moines at Mercy College of Health Sciences. They were immediately introduced to the fine values that constitute the student experience at Mercy College: knowledge, excellence, compassion, reverence and integrity, which continually point students to the Catholic mission of the college.

The Archbishop had the opportunity to meet with the 137 new nursing students who were just beginning orientation in preparation for their anticipated years at the college. The Archbishop pointed out how the college's five values when integrated into their studies and eventually into their nursing practice provide a solid basis for continuing the tradition of the Sisters of Mercy and being of authentic service to the patients they will serve.

Mercy College is thriving with a capacity student enrollment of 840 preparing in allied medical health fields to serve the medical enterprise. On the basis of a federal grant of \$3.4 million Mercy College is introducing an innovative program entitled "Pathways to Healthcare Careers Iowa." This project will recruit, screen and provide training and support services to limited English proficient refugees and immigrants in Iowa to help them pursue careers in the healthcare industry. This initiative furthers the precedent setting leadership of Governor Bob Ray who led Iowa in establishing the first of such programs in the United States decades ago.

As you might well expect the visitors from the Vatican were highly impressed by the Mercy Medical outreach and all of its components which bless our community with consistent outstanding service in central Iowa every day.

The community was also blessed and inspired by the Archbishop's visit. The Bulletin of Mercy Medical Center of September 3, 2010 noted:

"Throughout his visit, Archbishop Zimowski visibly demonstrated the connection of healthcare and faith. At the special Mass, the Archbishop's homily noted the Sisters of Mercy started great work that now must be carried on by others, reminding us, 'We are Jesus Christ's hands on earth. We must also be his heart.'"