

Happy 100th Birthday, Kalispell Regional Medical Center. I'm glad you people could join us to celebrate our centennial anniversary. I am Sister Roxanne Dolak, a Sister of Mercy from Cedar Rapids, Iowa, who is presently the hospital's RN chart auditor. It was Sisters from my Order who first opened the hospital 100 years ago today.

I believe that to truly celebrate this centennial and understand where we are today, we need to look at where we started and how far we have come. So I begin with this question:

Why did a group of Sisters of Mercy from Iowa come all the way to Montana to start up a new hospital?

To answer this, I am going to go back almost 200 years and look at the beginning of the Sisters of Mercy order itself.

In 1830 in Dublin, Ireland, there was a lady named Catherine McAuley who had inherited a large sum of money from her foster parents. She was a compassionate person who believed in Jesus' mandate to help those in need. Moved by the plight of the poor people of Dublin, Catherine decided to use her money to build a home for young women who came to the city looking for work and who were often at a safety risk. Soon other women joined her to help with this project. They lived together, ate together, and prayed together.

When the Catholic bishop of the diocese saw what was happening, he told Catherine that, because they were living like nuns, she had to turn her group into an order of nuns. She did not want to do it, but because she felt that God was leading them in this direction, she complied. Every religious order has a name. Catherine, now called Mother McAuley because she was the leader, took the name Sisters of Mercy. And so on December 12, 1831, the Order of the Sisters of Mercy was founded.

All Sisters of Mercy make a vow to God of service to the poor, the sick, and the ignorant. I made the same vow when I became a Sister of Mercy.

Guided by Mother McAuley's **vision and deep faith in God's providence**, the Sisters of Mercy went on to open schools, hospitals, and even an orphanage. No one in need was turned away. You didn't have to show credentials to prove your need. Catherine taught the Sisters this:

It is better to relieve 100 imposters, if there be such, than to suffer one really distressed person to be sent away empty.

We could use a little of that philosophy today in our culture of cynicism, in which so many people in need fall through the cracks.

Eventually Catholic bishops in the eastern United States asked Mother McAuley to send Sisters of Mercy to come to America to open schools and hospitals to serve the many immigrants who were pouring into the country from Europe. Guided by their own **vision and faith in the Providence of God**, the first Sisters arrived in Pittsburgh in 1843 and started their work. As time went on, they were joined by many women, and the Order spread throughout the United States. On July 22, 1875, a convent was opened in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. That is where I entered the Sisters of Mercy on August 1, 1951, and it is where I plan to live when I retire.

In 1910, John Carroll was Bishop of the Helena diocese here in Montana. He is the man who founded the college that still bears his name today, Carroll College. Some of you have gone to school there. Bishop Carroll came from Iowa, and so he knew about the works of the Sisters of Mercy in Cedar Rapids. This explains why in March of 1910, he pleaded with Mother Gertrude, who was the then elected leader of our Order, to send Sisters to Kalispell to open a hospital.

In August of that year, a group of business men in Kalispell formed a board of directors which became the Kalispell General Hospital Corporation. They entered into a contract with the Sisters of Mercy to construct and operate a new hospital. One of the members, Judge Smith, rented a cottage on the corner of Fourth Avenue and Third Street East to serve as a temporary hospital. Two Sisters soon arrived to solicit funds and buy supplies to stock the hospital.

And so it was that, on a rainy September 1, 1910, at 11 a.m., 100 years ago today, three nursing Sisters, guided by their **vision and faith in the providence of God**, arrived by train to start the operation. Sisters Mary Philomena, Clement, and Vincentia had just settled down for lunch at the cottage when a call came from Dr. O'Neil, asking if the nursing Sisters had arrived. He had a patient who was very sick with typhoid fever. The man was promptly admitted, and Kalispell General Hospital became a reality. He was cared for and then discharged as improved on September 12. His total bill for those 12 days was \$28.

Eventually the cottage was moved to the site where construction was started on a new hospital at 745 Fifth Avenue East. It was completed in May, 1912, at the cost of \$46,000. \$20,000 was contributed by the people of Kalispell, and \$26,000 by the Sisters of Mercy. The Medical Staff was organized in 1922. On their executive committee was Dr. A. Brassett, in whose honor was later established the Brassett Award, given each year to the Employee of the Year, who has been recommended by peers.

Through the years additions were made to Kalispell General Hospital, including a new wing on the south side in 1949, and a convent wing on the north in 1963. It has also been through some interesting events, including two earthquakes.

Another event occurred on December 12, 1925. The Sisters were eating a late supper when they smelled burning rubber. They were looking for the source of the odor when a loud explosion occurred, followed by a tremendous shattering of glass. Broken glass was everywhere, even on the patients' beds.

It turned out that the hospital had been dynamited. A woman who wanted to do damage to her husband, a patient in the hospital, got a neighbor boy to place a lighted fuse through the window of the Sisters' dining room on the ground floor. All the windows on the south and west sides of the building were blown out and extensive damage was done to the plumbing. Patients were badly frightened and three left the hospital in sheer terror. The rest remained, and the Sisters thanked God that no one was injured. The citizens of Kalispell chipped in to clean up the mess and repair the damage.

In September 1973, the collaboration between the Sisters of Mercy and Kalispell came to an end when the decision was made to build a new hospital on Buffalo Hill on the north side of town, and the Sisters decided not to be involved. Sister Mary Brendan and Sister Mary Regis stayed on as employees, and two more Sisters came in 1975. I was one of those who came. My first day of work was on the fourth floor surgical unit on the 3-11 shift, June 30, 1975. George Clark was the new administrator.

On January 17, 1976, we moved to the new hospital on Sunnyview Lane. The old hospital became Courthouse East and was used by the county for various offices until a new courthouse building could be constructed. At one time there was talk of tearing down the old building. Eventually it was bought by some businessmen who completely renovated it and turned it into Eastside Brick, which houses condominiums and offices. I often go by that building during my morning run. I have fond memories of the years in the 1960's when I was a school teacher at St. Matthew's School, and we Sisters from the school often got together with the Sisters at the hospital for holiday and other celebrations. I am glad that old building, which has so much history, still stands today.

Although the Sisters of Mercy no longer operate the hospital in Kalispell, the **vision and faith** of those pioneers continued under the guidance of George Clark and down through the present day by Velinda Stevens and her administration. They have constantly put the health care needs of the people of Northwest Montana at the forefront.

Here are some of the services that have been expanded during these last 40 plus years:

- a focus on outpatient services
- ALERT—Advanced Life support Emergency Rescue Team—the second air ambulance service established in the United States
- Home Care
- New Addition, the birthing and newborn center
- renal dialysis
- Social Services, which now is included in Case Management Pathways, a free standing mental health center
- expanded ER with nurses and board certified doctors on duty 24 hours a day
- the Summit, a state of the art health promotion center
- in patient rehab unit
- heart catheterization and open heart surgery
- a mobile mammogram unit
- HCNW with its Women's Imaging Center
- a barometric pressure unit for wound care
- Intensive Care Nursery Unit
- Cancer Radiation Center
- the Bass Center for treatment of breast cancer
- Employee Assistance Program
- Kid Kare: child care service for on duty employees
- expanded OR, ER, lab, radiology
- two full time chaplains

and, of course, a whole new patient tower.

One service I would particularly like to acknowledge came about partly due to the influence of one nun, Sister Mary Brendan. Before she entered the convent, Sister Brendan was a nurse for General Motors in Detroit and would ride in the ambulance with injured employees when they were taken to the hospital. When she came to Kalispell, she started as a nurse on the floor in the old hospital. At about that time administration was realizing a need for patient discharge planning. So Sister Mary Brendan was asked to set up a program.

It soon became obvious that there was no place where a patient could go for intermediate skilled care between discharge from the hospital and final placement at home or some other facility. Also, the Flathead Valley was in need of more long term nursing care beds. Sister Brendan began to have a **vision** of such a building right here on the campus. But Sister Brendan did not just stop with **faith in God's providence**—she pestered George Clark and the administration until they acted. The completed building was dedicated on April 1st (April Fools' Day), 1985. Imagine her surprise and delight when the curtain was pulled and the name Brendan House was revealed.

Sister Brendan died several years ago. I like to think that she and all the other Sisters who have worked here, especially those pioneers who came in 1910, continue to smile down on us from heaven and ask God to bless Kalispell Regional Medical Center.

When our new patient tower was being constructed, a beam for the building was set out on the grounds so that employees could sign it. I missed out on that. When Don Williams, who was in charge of construction, heard about it, he appeared at my office door and took me outdoors. I was equipped with a hard hat and taken by a worker in a lift to the top of the building. There I wrote the following blessing on one of the beams:

God, bless this building and all who enter here.

Sister Roxanne Dolak

Sisters of Mercy

March 14, 2002.

And so I tell people, whenever you come into this building, you receive a blessing, even if it's just to use the toilet.

Happy 100th Anniversary to all of us at Kalispell Regional Medical Center. Let us continue, with **vision** and **faith in God and our mission**, to serve the health care needs of the people of Northwestern Montana.