

IHMs IN ACTION



Sister Laura (Laura Mary) Hardage, IHM, is a full-time chaplain at St. Joseph Healthcare, which includes two hospitals and nearly 700 beds in the Diocese of Lexington, Ky.

Sister Laura works in the largest critical care unit in the hospital, primarily with patients who have undergone cardiac or pulmonary surgeries.

"We're a regional heart institute, and many of our patients are in critical condition," she says. "A crisis can

happen very quickly, so we have a chaplain available on-site 24/7. There is a great emphasis on being with people when they are at their most vulnerable, including as they prepare for death. Being with them is a privilege."

Sister Laura was drawn to St. Joseph Healthcare because of its values and strong commitments to the poor – values and commitments shared by the IHM Sisters.

"We care for the whole person here," she explains. "Many of our patients come from the impoverished areas in the Appalachian Mountains. They aren't accustomed to being treated with dignity and respect – it actually comes as a surprise to them!"

Sometimes that respect comes with a healthy dose of tough love.

Sister Laura recalls a 40-year-old mother of three who was addicted to drugs. The woman needed heart valve replacement. Sister Laura told her emphatically, "God has given you another chance. Don't mess it up!"

The patient was drug-free for about six-weeks prior to surgery and has developed a strong support system, joining a Narcotics Anonymous group, to help her battle her addiction.

"She's doing well, although she's still hospitalized with IV antibiotics," reports Sister Laura. "This is what I appreciate about St. Joe's —everyone gets the same top care and the same respect, regardless of their circumstances or their ability to pay."

In addition to her role as chaplain, Sister Laura is also a member of the St. Joseph Healthcare Foundation board of directors, as well as several groups working to improve the lives and health of the marginalized within the Lexington community.

For instance, through the Justice Committee of the University of Kentucky Newman Center, her home parish, Sister Laura is involved with BUILD – Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct-action.

"BUILD has 21 religious congregations working together to address community issues," Sister Laura explains. "For instance, Lexington had rehab programs available to men addicted to drugs, but none for women. Through BUILD, women now have access to

services. In fact, St. Joe's has hired some of them, and they're getting second chances through employment we've developed for women addicted to drugs."

Sister Laura's love of those to whom she ministers – both at St. Joseph Healthcare – and through her volunteer ministries -- is obvious.

"It's a blessing to me," she says simply.