



## Staying True to Truth in Tough Times

When we hit those crossroad moments, calling us to discern more deeply what we believe to see the way through, what do we do?

On Tuesday, March 14<sup>th</sup> Tom Andrews, CEO of Mercy Care Atlanta, led all those in attendance through a discussion and reflection on this very topic: “Staying True to Truth in Tough Times.”

“Healthcare in the last 20 years has had lots of changes,” Andrews said. “If not for doing the work at Mercy over the last 15 years around the ‘care of the poor’, I am not sure I would still be in the healthcare industry.”



Andrews, who has spent 40 years in the healthcare industry and has been in Atlanta for 31 years, was named President/CEO of Saint Joseph’s Health System in April 2012, and President of Mercy Care in September 2003. He oversees the Saint Joseph’s Health System which includes Mercy Care, Mercy Care Foundation, Mercy Care Rome, and also has an investment in a joint operating company with Emory Healthcare that includes joint ownership in Emory Saint Joseph’s and Emory John’s Creek hospitals.

“Mercy Care was the result of a strategic move of Saint Joseph’s Hospital when they moved from downtown Atlanta to the suburbs in the mid -1970s where the patient base was no longer the poor and underserved,” shared Andrews, who ironically was born in St. Joseph’s Hospital in Lorain, OH. “The doctors, nurses and Sisters of Mercy felt like they had left part of the mission downtown so a volunteer corps was created to return to those roots.”

Amidst this period for Mercy Care, Andrews had landed at St. Joseph’s Hospital, and then later started a consulting business to help physicians manage their practices. With a bit of convincing from Nancy Paris, who is now the President/CEO of GA CORE, he started volunteering with Mercy Care packing tackle boxes of medical supplies as a part of Mercy Care’s ‘volunteer corps.’

Then Andrews’ former colleague and mentor, Bonnie Phipps, who was CEO of Saint Joseph’s at the time, approached Andrews about becoming the President of Mercy Care.

Today, Mercy Care is an organization led by Andrews that provides a variety of medical, dental, and other health services including behavioral health, mental health case management, respite care, vision, diagnostics, health education, residential support services and homeless street medicine and outreach. In 2016, Mercy Care provided services to over 12,000 patients with over 50,000 office visits.

“The services provided by our 220 employees centers on primary care and integrated behavioral health,” Andrews said. “This service happens in our facilities but also through outreach efforts like our street medicine program when our people go out two nights a week to engage the chronically homeless living under the bridges.”

Andrews added, "When the Sisters of Mercy began in the 1830s, they were about going out in the community they were referred to as the walking nuns. Among those we serve, 65% are homeless, 87% are uninsured, and 33% are best served in a language other than English. The mission and spirit of the Sisters continues."

Though the mission established for the hospital by the Sisters of Mercy has always been 'to give tangible expression to Christ's merciful love by providing compassionate, clinically excellent health care in the spirit of loving service to those in need, with special attention to the poor and vulnerable,' that doesn't mean everything has always been smooth sailing for Andrews and his colleagues.

"By 2009, Catholic Health East (CHE), an east coast Catholic health care system that Saint Joseph's was a part of, and the hospital board determined that the hospital couldn't survive on its own. "We were courted by multiple suitors to partner with, had a deal in place with one, but then got left at the altar. Then the decision was made to sell the hospital and after a long due diligence period, it was narrowed down to three offers – two to buy the hospital and one looking to create a partnership."



Andrews said that throughout this process the Sisters of Mercy were actively involved in the decision-making. The board of directors had always been driven by "what do the Sisters want to do."

"The Sisters told us, 'You need to have a structure in place to carry on the mission without the Sisters present,'" Andrews said. "We had to evolve from asking, 'What do the Sisters want?' to 'What would the Sisters have wanted?'"

Ultimately, the decision was made to partner with Emory – creating a joint operating company with Emory owning 51% and managing the hospital, and Saint Joseph's Health System having 49% ownership. The Sisters also did not want Mercy Care to be a part of the "merger" with Emory as they wanted that part of the mission to remain independent and a legacy of the Sisters. CHE had promised to commit a significant amount of the proceeds of the sale of the hospital for Mercy Care's future growth and sustainability.

"There had been a concern throughout the process about wanting to maintain the culture and the Catholic identity of the hospital, so that was part of why Emory was chosen."

Unfortunately, the decision made by the board to not sell but to partner was not received well by CHE. The new joint venture was created and went operational in 2012, but CHE was no longer supportive of creating an "endowment" for Mercy Care.

At the time, Andrews was the President of Mercy Care and had not been involved in the decision made by the board. He was subsequently approached CHE to also assume the responsibility of being CEO of Saint Joseph's Health System.

"To be honest, I was very hesitant to accept the new position given all that was going on between SJHS Board and CHE, but I finally concluded that my love of the mission of Mercy Care would allow me to hopefully find a way to settle the dispute."

For Andrews, it was a test of faith.

“The focus at this time was clear – to build relationships to start new.”

After some time in his new role, Andrews worked with the local board and the leadership at CHE to "get to the truth." Nearly one year later, an agreement was approved that provided for the growth and sustainability of Mercy Care.

“Those first 2.5 years in the new role were very stressful and there were many times I had to rely on my faith. Yet, in getting to truth, I can look back and see how everything that evolved drew from four of Mercy Care’s five core values – stewardship, integrity, care of the poor, and justice.”

Around the same time all this was going on for Andrews, Pope Francis became the leader of the Catholic Church.

“I was raised Catholic, but had fallen away from the church for a number of years. Pope Francis’ leadership of the church has been an inspiration for me personally.”



One interesting personal story Andrews shared had to do with a trip he made to Rome a year ago.

“The Papal Almoner, Archbishop Krajewski, used to take left-over food from the Swiss Guard at the Vatican and go out in the streets to serve Rome’s homeless,” Andrews stated. “Once the Pope became aware of this, he told Archbishop Krajewski that he needed to increase the support of the homeless and use the funds that were available to him.”

Now there are things such as private tours of the Vatican for the homeless; and showers, restrooms and shelters for the homeless close to the Vatican.

“Last year I made plans for a personal trip to Rome, and I asked Archbishop Gregory to write a letter to Archbishop Krajewski and request an audience when I would be in Rome. We made hygiene kits to bring and distribute to the homeless and donation to the homeless work from our Foundation.”

When Andrews got to Rome, he still had not had a response from Archbishop Krajewski. During a tour of the Vatican he told the story of seeking an audience with the Archbishop to the tour guide. She told Andrews her husband might be able to help as he had friends that worked for the Vatican. When Andrews met up with her husband he made arrangements for him to come to Vatican to bring the "gifts."

“When I arrived, the Pope’s personal valet came out to greet me, and I gave him the \$1,000 check and the hygiene kits. He was very moved by the gifts and asked me to wait. A short while later he came back and said the Pope thanked him for his desire to help the homeless in Rome and presented him with four tickets to sit in the front section of the blessing at St. Peter’s Square the next day. So I got to see him up close that day.”

Before ending his remarks, and taking questions from the audience, Andrews said he wanted to close with a prayer.

“I took part in a Catholic Leadership Conference for two years,” he shared. “In the experience, we were led to write statements of ‘This I believe ...’ which was impactful. We also were led to reflect on this prayer I’d like to read – *Of God*

*of Power and Might* – which led me to reflect on leaders having impact on people, especially when they don't realize that how they are leading can be harmful."



*"Oh God of power and might, give me greater insight on my leadership role and its potential influence, especially on those with whom I serve; Help me recognize how I may at times negatively impact on others because of my role; Open my eyes to the hurt and unintentional negative messages I may convey; and give me your guidance and support to learn from my mistakes; Keep me focused on my roles as your servant and a servant to those most in need; And above all give me the patience and the temperament to treat all of my colleagues and patient's with respect, reverence, empathy and compassion."*

After Andrews shared the prayer, John Monroe, CFO of Trade Rocket, asked, "In your role, you're running an \$18 million business, but you also have mission. There's tension between the two. How do you manage that?"

Andrews responded, "You hit the nail on the head. It's what's in the heart versus what's in the head. With staff, it's different than with the four Boards involved in the leadership of the Mercy Care. With the Boards it's often important to remind them of the mission and then address the business case for certain decisions. With staff, there's a sense that we've grown and been successful so 'money must grow on trees.' As a result, it's important to keep the business side in front of them by doing things like having a strategic plan and holding them accountable."

CTK Parishioner John Ribka then asked, "What led you to come back to the Catholic Church?"

"My heart never left," said Andrews in response. "The church wasn't sending the right message to me and I felt an emptiness that wasn't being filled. I did like the message from the Episcopal faith around 'giving back and serving those in need.' Then I heard Pope Francis speak about 'it's about those in need and serving them.' When I walked back in Immaculate Heart of Mary Catholic Church, I felt like I was home."

Andrews was then asked how he has seen the needs of the homeless change.

"Atlanta's seen a drop in the number of people who are homeless over the last five years."

He added that the downturn in the economy in years past led to non-profits combining efforts to be able to work more collaboratively.

"In 2011, HUD also determined local funds were not always used effectively, leading to a separate non-profit having to be formed in cities to have better visibility to fund allocation. At the same time, we have been moving away from a shelter-based approach and towards a rapid rehousing approach to serving the homeless. Mercy Care has injected healthcare into the homelessness discussion."

Andrews had time for one last question and comment, which came from CTK Parishioner Charles Jones about Mercy Care's outreach visits to reach the homeless living under the bridges.

"It's all about developing trust," said Andrews. "Anytime I get too much in the business realm, I get out with the outreach team."

Andrews told everyone of the time when he was in the outreach van on a very cold night and a young homeless man asked if he could use his cell phone. When Andrews asked the young man why he was living on the streets, he told Andrews he had come to Atlanta for a job but things fell through and he ran out of money. He said that his mom was probably worried about him

However, Andrews saved his favorite story for last.

“We host a Fall Festival each year, providing 500-600 homeless people from shelters with a day of fun,” stated Andrews. “One time at the festival, a homeless woman said she wanted to make a donation to Mercy Care. I wanted to say ‘no’ but that wasn’t honoring what she offered. She went on to say, ‘Seven to eight years ago, Mercy Care mobile mammography unit made it possible for me to get a mammogram. If not for that, I wouldn’t be here today.’”