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Feature



Jere Palazzolo with Cardinal Burke



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A message from Saint Padre Pio



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The Padre Pio Casa, including a medical center, an adoration and prayer chapel, and an accredited medical school, will soon be part of the Howell community in Livingston County.

Formerly McPherson Hospital, now owned by Trinity Healthcare, the property at 620 Byron Road in Howell was purchased by Catholic Healthcare International (CHI) after Trinity began moving its medical services to Brighton. It was an opportunity CHI and the Diocese of Lansing saw as the fulfillment of a vision.

“Padre Pio was there, and I could kind of feel his hand on my arm, and he said, ‘It is time.’ And it was so clear to me at that point that he was saying, ‘Hey! I want you to pursue the expansion of this vision beyond the hospital over in Italy,’” said Jere Palazzolo, president of CHI.

Saintly inspiration

Palazzolo spent his career as a hospital administrator and said he'd seen many changes to healthcare financing that were neither patient-centered nor Catholic. He has wanted to get back to the roots of Catholic healthcare for a long time.

It wasn't until he began a devotion to the Italian saint and learned more about his life that Palazzolo learned about San Giovanni Rotondo, in Italy, where Padre Pio founded a hospital. It was while reading about Padre Pio's life that "He recruited us or chose us to build his hospital."

Just before he felt the hand of Padre Pio on his arm, Palazzolo read the words, "The Casa Sollievo della Sofferenza (A Home for the Relief of Suffering) should therefore be the first link in a great chain. It should be the model for many other innumerable Casas with the same name, and above all the same spirit, which must bring love to all of humanity. A program which would make us tremble with awe, if it was not inspired by God, who is above all, love!"

"I went over to Italy and met with them and told them that I felt like I was being called by Padre Pio to expand this vision beyond Italy, figuring that they would laugh at me and throw me out. And, as a matter of fact, they said, 'yeah, we still believe in that.'"

An evolving approach to healthcare

From there, it wasn't hard to pull together people willing to help, including Bishop Earl Boyea of the Diocese of Lansing, Father Tim Nelson, Cardinal Raymond Burke, Bobby Schindler, President of the Terri Schiavo Life and Hope Network, and Dr. George Mychaskiw, who is helping to bring a faithful Catholic medical school to the facility.

"The physicians trained here will make a difference all over the world," said Ann O'Reilly, Palazzolo's assistant. "It's truly going to transform healthcare really in the world, because our St. Pio physicians will be trained here, but then go out into the world to influence the systems they end up in."

Their influence will come from a uniquely Catholic perspective, which means the medical students will graduate both with a medical degree and a master's degree in Catholic bioethics and medical theology.

Along with the medical school, the campus will be home to the Center for the Unborn, which will house embryos, which O'Reilly said will save them from becoming medical waste or sold for research, "which is flat out human trafficking."

The Center for the Unborn will be placed in the chapel next to the altar, where families can pray for the babies. O'Reilly said they are also working on a process so families can spiritually adopt the babies. "So you can pray by name. And again, I think it sends a better message to the secular world that these truly are human beings."

Another distinctly Catholic part of the Casa is the Terri Schiavo Center for the Brain Injured, where people with severe brain injuries will be treated and their families given a community. O'Reilly said, "Many brain-injured people are assumed to not be there anymore, and we know that in so many cases, they actually are. So, each patient will be treated as a child of God, and we will talk with them, and we will have them be a part of the community."

In the space between, O'Reilly said there will be a multidisciplinary family practice. "It will again be very Catholic. We hope to do a lot with NaPro Technology, the natural procreative family planning," which O'Reilly said is an alternative to IVF, doesn't go against God's plan, and is much cheaper.

Continuing the legacy

With its longstanding history in Howell, Trinity Health - care isn't leaving all of its patients behind either. O'Reilly said they will continue to have a center there and provide for the patients and the Howell community.

"Of course, the biggest need right now is funding. It's the calling of a saint, and we need saints to make it happen. And the thing is, when you answer the call and you go where God leads, the side effect is a joy that the world can't give you," she said.

To learn more or to contribute to the Padre Pio Medical Casa visit the [website](#) or contact Ann O'Reilly at aoreilly@chi-usa.com.

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