



# A Reflection

## FROM FORT SMITH, ARKANSAS

MARTIN SCHREIBER, EdD

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house.” — Matthew 5:14-15*

**F**rom John Winthrop to John Kennedy to Ronald Reagan, America’s leaders have defined our country as a shining “city on a hill.” We Americans imagine that our light as a nation shines forth to the world and attracts many to our shores. President Reagan described the border of Fort Smith, Arkansas — and our nation — in his 1989 farewell speech: “And if there had to be city walls, the walls had doors and the doors were open to anyone with the will and the heart to get here.” We are, he said, “still a beacon, still a magnet for all who must have freedom, for all the pilgrims from all the lost places who are hurtling through the darkness, toward home.”

Where does Catholic health care fit in this shining city? We know that our city is meant for those whom Jesus called blessed — the lowly and humble, the mourners and the meek. We know that our lampstand isn’t simply a beacon attracting others to our goodness. Our light must enter the world saying, “Oh, there you are,” and not “Here I am.” The shining city teems with light-filled people who illuminate the dignity and promise of those pilgrims who seek a better life for themselves and their children. We in Catholic health care must be the door through which pilgrims enter the city.

We hear the call of the pilgrim here in Fort Smith as the vulnerable voice of a child. One of our community members spoke about her grandson coming back from school with an anxious face. He was worried he might not find his grandmother at home after school, but she assured him not to worry. Recently, our physicians and practitioners reached out to the people in our immigrant community with free physicals simply to open the door to possible ways for them not to feel alone.

We respond to the pilgrim and make ourselves inclusive as an institution by learning their lan-

guage. A group at Mercy Fort Smith took time to take Spanish lessons every Wednesday afternoon. Listening to another in a different tone or setting allows more understanding. Empathy means spending time in uncomfortable waters and extending oneself to learn something new.

Catholic health care is universal, and we know we are called to go beyond the wall. In October 2017, a discovery team will explore the Sisters of Mercy Peru mission to understand the needs of the community and how to respond. Team members include executives, nurses and physicians at Mercy, along with community leaders. Understanding a mission witnesses to the reality of how another lives and where some started their journey as a pilgrim.

We are a pilgrim church. Our light is still shining along the way. How we enter into the culture of encounter that Pope Francis encourages us to walk will determine our path forward in Catholic health care.

**MARTIN SCHREIBER** is vice president of mission at Mercy Fort Smith in Arkansas.

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