**Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center – An Example of Systems Thinking**

Yvanna’s face was alight with joy, pure joy, her smile wide and engaging. She not only captured my attention but the attention of several of the other adults who were walking around after the blessing and dedication of the new Paul Edward Verni Playground at Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center on October 14. She was joined by her nurse, Vinnie. who was by her side as she glided in her chair on the new playground's four seater slider. Two other medically compromised young children were also delighting in the experience, each child accompanied by their special aide.

It is always moving and inspiring to visit Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center and see the children, parents, other family members and staff interact with one another. Love is visible and incarnate in staff, administration and families – all put the children and their needs first. Today was especially moving. The “we” gathered together as one family were the Verni family, public officials, legislators, Kenneth Theobalds, Vice President of Government and Regulatory Affairs for Entergy, the Sisters of Charity of New York (sponsors), staff, family and children. For me, and maybe for the rest of the “family” gathered, the children and staff made real the love and presence of God in our midst. And in doing so, called me (and hopefully others) forth to love anew…to demonstrate in new ways the love of God through our actions, choices, and decisions. Yes, there were tears in my eyes and a choked up feeling and sad heart. I get that way when I see someone in need, in pain or hurting. But the children and staff teach me to go beyond these feelings to see the power of love at work. The power that comes from being present to another. The power of relationship, of giving excellent skilled professional care with hearts that are open, warm and compassionate, with minds and hearts that creatively seek new and better ways to bring respect, learning, fun, and a homelike atmosphere to the children and their families.

When I see and experience this love in action, I think of the ministries sponsored by Sisters of Charity of New York that practice systems thinking. Board members, Presidents and CEOs, Administrators and Staff often say to me, “We are about direct service, not systemic change.” And, I often flounder in expressing how the Sisters of Charity of New York sponsored works are about putting love in action through systemic change. Love and systems thinking are not often equated. The charism of charity that sponsored ministries are being asked to bring into the future is not often understood as “Civic and Political Love”, so eloquently explained by Pope Francis in Laudato Si’: On Care For Our Common Home.

The Vincentian Family, of which we are a part, sees systemic change as integral to who we are. This 2017 we celebrate the 400th Anniversary of the Charism of Charity and the 200th Anniversary of the Sisters of Charity being in New York. Since our very beginnings, we (the Sisters and their colleagues) accompanied children, families, people in need who were vulnerable, creating opportunities so that their voices, stories and needs could be heard and addressed. We continue to do this today. In collaboration with so many (such as Boards, Associates, Public Officials, Legislators, friends and family), we are about systems thinking in all its various aspects. No one person, no one situation addresses it all but together we are about creating and re-creating just systems, policies, structures, organizations and ministries that foster respect, integrity, compassion and excellence.

The working definition of systemic change for the Vincentian Family of North America is “Systemic Change, in works among those living in poverty, aims beyond providing food, clothing and shelter to alleviate immediate needs; it enables people themselves to engage in the identification of the root causes of their poverty and to create strategies to change those structures which keep them in poverty; this requires changing attitudes that have caused the problem.” A broad definition of systemic change might be: “change that pervades all parts of a system, taking into account the interrelationships and interdependencies among those parts.”

The reality of poverty includes but also extends beyond economics and income; it covers a broad range to include those who are vulnerable, at risk and on the fringe. Isn’t Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center a place that helps us, through the eyes of the children and their families, experience their reality of being at risk, on the fringe and vulnerable? Isn’t the Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center about creating systems and structures that enable the children and families to live lives that are life giving, meaningful and healthy? Isn’t this systemic change?

At Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center, I see people who care and who form relationships with people. I see people who offer respect, dignity, support, resources and new pathways to those they serve. Aren't relationships and presence to another, education, and resource building part of systemic change? Helping another to advocate for her/him(self) or their family is about systemic change. Board members and Management who exercise their judiciary responsibilities to ensure excellent respectful compassionate care is to keep the system (the institution or organization) integral and whole and prevent a closed and broken system. Systemic change happens in many ways. First and foremost, we need to be aware of the system we are part of and how that system is part of a larger whole. This is the hope, goal, and I would say the mission of the Sisters of Charity of New York – this is love in action.

Many things moved me at the Blessing and dedication of the Paul Edward Verni Playground. The children's choir with Josh enthusiastically singing at the mike; the children, with the assistance of their therapists, waving colorful cloths in rhythm with the music; Yvanna tapping her hands on a drum; Mary and Vito Verni sharing their son, Paul's 19 year life story; and hearing that Shelley Mayer, other legislators, and corporations worked with Pat Tursi, CEO, to make sure that there is a place like Elizabeth Seton Pediatric Center with a playground for medically fragile children to experience play and fun.

But the image and words ingrained in me that speak to systemic change and systems thinking are: the smile on Yvanna’s face and Pat Tursi's remark that it was the staff’s vision and call to meet the children’s needs that seeded the idea of this playground. “What about a playground for the children? The children need to play like other children. The children first.” The staff saw and listened to the children. Pat saw and listened to the staff and the children. The Verni family, legislators, public officials, corporations, Sponsor and Board heard the children through the staff. Change happened. A new playground is here. Children are delighting in it! Isn't this systemic change and systems thinking at its best? *Carol De Angelo, SC, October 16, 2016*