

HEALTH

Sacred Heart Mercy Welcomes New Endocrinologist

By William Meiners
Herald Staff Writer

Dr. Sister Grace Miriam Usala, who just arrived last month in Alma at the Sacred Heart Mercy Health Care Center, brings the clinic a new specialist as an endocrinologist.

Usala earned her medical degree in 2017 from Georgetown University and finished her residency there in 2020. She served as a primary care physician for two years near Tulsa, Oklahoma. And spent another two years working on her endocrinology fellowship at Washington University in St. Louis.

Such travels are not unusual for Usala, now 39 years old. She tells folks that she grew up in Texas, where she spent her formative years (between 10 and 18) in Amarillo. Her father was also an endocrinologist, and she said she grew up thinking she would follow in his footsteps.

"My mother got really sick when I was 12 years old," Usala told The Herald last week. "My father essentially saved her life by making a diagnosis that was really unusual."

Around that same time she started thinking about becoming a sister. "It makes you think how fragile life is," Usala said. "I wanted to live for something eternal."

She isn't brand new to Alma. "This is our mother house, and I entered the community in 2007," said Usala, who lived here until 2009 before being assigned to Washington D.C.

High quality degrees may set this particular community of nuns apart. "We attempt to educate our sisters to the highest degree they can get so we can serve the people," Usala said. "Everyone deserves excellent health care. Everyone deserves an excellent teacher, an excellent lawyer. Our sisters are trained to the very highest of their potential. And we take a vow of service to the poor, sick, and ignorant."

Though she is quite comfortable providing primary care, Usala may be most excited about the focus on endocrinology, which she noted is "essentially anything glandular." Think diabetes, thyroid, adrenal, and some reproductive issues. "We call ourselves the hormone doctors," she said.

Usala also said that it's her understanding that there has not been an endocrinologist in the area. "It's exciting to allow people to get that care closer to home," she said.

To that end, the clinic is accepting new patients, and Usala said it might be important to note that "although we're a Catholic institu-

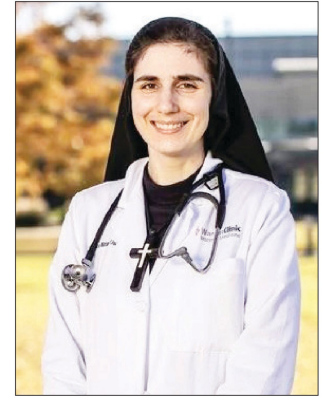
tion, we welcome patients of any faith."

There's a chapel within the center, an "important place at the clinic," said Usala, who will also pray with patients. Though she reiterated that the patients need not "share our faith."

There are lots of religious orders. Among them are the Carmelites, Dominicans, and Franciscans. The Sisters of Mercy of Alma, Michigan, Usala said, is a reformation of an Irish community in 1973. With a vow of poverty, they make their own clothes and focus on service.

Usala likened the religious service to "God's army," where one might get called to serve anywhere. Sometimes she said you'll see doctors who become priests later in life, perhaps serving in a missionary role. It's less common to see the doctor/sister combination, and Usala tends to know them, including some of the sisters in her community.


The focus of the clinic is quality care. Usala said recently the sisters have started offering fertility services. Not IVF treatments, she noted, but rather attempts to see what can be done medically to help women




who are having trouble becoming pregnant. To learn more about the services of the Sacred Heart Mercy Health Care Center, you can look to their website at www.sacredheartmercy.org.




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