

THERE IS NO OTHER PLACE LIKE TEPEYAC

AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. MARIE ANDERSON OB/GYN, MEDICAL DIRECTOR, TEPEYAC

BY PATTY WHELPLEY, DMC VOLUNTEER

We'd love to hear about your childhood/college years. Where did you grow up? What was your childhood like?

Dr. Anderson: I was born in Indiana to Catholic parents. My mother was a full time homemaker. My father was trained in the Army Air Corp to fly missions during WWII but was never deployed. He flew for American Airlines for his entire career. When I initially started school in Indiana, I attended a Catholic school. However, when I was in the 5th grade, we moved to Marshall, Virginia where we transferred to public school. I was the oldest of eight children, but only four of us survived. The other four babies were lost in very dramatic ways. My mother experienced months of bedrest, several hemorrhages, a still-born, and a preterm baby that lived for two days. Since I was the oldest, I watched my parents endure these losses and risks to my mother's life. These images left a remarkable impression on me as I grew up, and they are a huge part of the reason I became an OB/GYN: I wanted to help women like my mother.

Is it true you were first a dental hygienist? Why did you switch to OB/GYN?

Dr. Anderson: I had studied pre-med at the College of William and Mary, but I realized that, if I were going to pursue that career, I would be at least 30 when I finished. Since I wanted to move on with my life, marry and have a family, I transferred to Virginia Commonwealth University and became a dental hygienist. Dave and I married the year after my graduation and I worked while he completed dental school. We had children, and after taking time off from work when they were young, I went back to work part-time. Around that time, I became thoroughly fascinated, as I continue to be, by the medical aspects of pregnancy. I read all that I could on the subject and had an unquenchable urge to learn more—and that was just a prelude to the profound desire that later developed concerning my faith. I found myself becoming frustrated that I had not gone to medical school. My husband was very supportive and encouraged me to follow my calling. He saw potential in me and helped me fulfill it. Thanks, in great part to his support, I eventually

graduated from Georgetown Medical School.

What prompted you to join Tepeyac Family Center (TFC)?

Dr. Anderson: That is the story of the conversion of my heart. Long before I became a physician, I had become a "cafeteria Catholic," picking and choosing certain practices to follow while ignoring others.

Consequently, I had fallen away from my faith. It was after I had finished medical school and was completing my OB/GYN residency that I first felt the moral pains of modern medicine through Catholic eyes. I was being trained in mainstream gynecology. Contraception and sterilization were standard. We residents even coined the catch phrase "stamp out fertility" to describe our job of encouraging women who had two or three children to have their tubes tied or at least contracept to control their reproductive lives from adolescence to menopause, with only a short break for "desired pregnancies."

Consequently, I saw the "fruits" of the contraceptive mentality: the sexually transmitted diseases (STD's), the teen

mothers abandoned by their boyfriends, the abused women, the divorced women, the women who were infertile because of pelvic abscesses which result from STDs. These situations bothered me. At that time in my life I saw them as "cases" rather than as God's children who deserved all of the dignity of the human person, that is, women with a body, soul, and spirit. Since I had not thought these things through, I ignored my faith issues for the time being and continued with my job. I knew in my heart something was wrong.

Little by little, I began to feel restless and anxious about the contradictions between my job and my faith. When I became an attending physician, I finally began to address the tough questions...things like: "What is the purpose of my life?" "What is the meaning of death?" "What contribution will I make?" I didn't know it then, but what I was really asking was: "What mission has God set forth for me?" The stage was set.

I started to become aware of an ominous "presence." It was almost as if there were gray clouds on the horizon. They were in the distance, so I ignored them at first. Then they



*Dr. Marie Anderson,
Medical Director of Tepeyac Family Center*

began to approach me. First they came slowly, but then they were imminent. I finally realized I had to address my faith issues and the inherent contradictions. I began meeting with my parish priest. Initially, our meetings were sporadic. As time went on though, my spiritual growth intensified. I grew progressively more restless. I began to see through the modern OB/GYN charade. I realized that neither we, nor our doctors, can control life. Only God can do that. It was then that I knew I had to change not only the way I thought, but also the way I practiced. While I was confused about how to handle the situation, I was certain that I must live my faith in every aspect of my life, especially in OB/GYN because so many of its accepted practices are in direct conflict with Church teachings.

I had many questions, so I found a spiritual director. He suggested that I pray to find the answers. I did pray. Then I read an article about the Tepeyac Family Center and the teaching of Natural

Family Planning (NFP). I had never heard of NFP. At Georgetown, we learned about the rhythm method. There is quite a difference between the two. I wanted to learn more about this safe and effective method for families to space their children. Moreover, I had never heard of an OB/GYN practice

whose motivation was the healing love of Jesus Christ. What an astounding principle to use as a basis for practicing modern medicine. It was simply beautiful, a breath of fresh air. It proved to be the turning point of my career and my spiritual life. In the months to come I would witness how God drew me back to my faith through the very means I had used to pull away from Him.

As I continued to work with my spiritual director, he suggested I meet Dr. John Bruchalski. At first I resisted, so he encouraged me, prodded me, and finally did everything in his power to help me meet the good doctor. At last, we met. What impressed me most was his amazing peace. It was simply beautiful. I longed for that peace because I was anything but peaceful. By this time, I was tormented. My restlessness had exploded. That meeting gave me direction. It changed my life. I shall be forever thankful to both men...but mostly to God for continuing to call me.

I continued to work with my current practice. I first reduced and then, over time, completely eliminated medical procedures that morally bothered me. It was a start, but in my heart I knew that I needed to be with Tepeyac, doing

God's work and seeing medicine from a new, fresh faith perspective. I wanted to work with like minded pro-life people within the foundation of NFP, to serve the poor, to work with the Crisis Pregnancy Center girls, and to live with the peace of my conscience. I didn't want to "not do things" because of my faith. Instead, I wanted my faith to be the positive force at the center of my life and therefore my practice. I finally felt ready to help women like my mother as they lived the adventure of bringing new life into God's world.

Yet, I loved the practice where I was. I had many close friends and patients there. My contract contained a noncompetitive clause that would forbid me from practicing within a five-mile radius. After a long struggle, and lots and lots of prayers, God's grace helped me make the break and allowed me to resign successfully from my old practice to join Tepeyac Family Center.

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What amazes me to this day is that God kept calling me for such a long time, and that so many people literally prayed me into Tepeyac Family Center. St. Augustine once said "Where sin abounds, grace abounds even more." God graced me with a miracle: a deep, restful, restorative peace. I was restless no more. I could truly feel

Christ's heart beating in me.

How about your personal interests? What would you like to share about yourself?

Dr. Anderson: First among my personal interests is my family. Dave and I have been married for 34 years. We first met at the Medical College of Virginia where he was in dental school and I in dental hygiene training.

Unbeknownst to me, God, in His providence, was preparing Dave to become my husband someday. The spouse of an obstetrician must have certain gifts in order to survive. When he was attending Seton Hall University, he was a member of a fraternity and lived in the house. He tells me that's where he learned to sleep through anything. In dental school the fire department actually evacuated his dorm and he slept peacefully through the whole ordeal, kind of like now. What do you think happens when you call your OB/GYN at 3AM? My husband sleeps through your call. He also was the cook for the fraternity house. Ever since I began medical school, he has assumed the cooking and shopping duties. We learned a long time ago that if our family waited

for me to come home and cook, they might starve in the meantime.

Consequently, my household chores focus on dirt, laundry, vacuuming, etc., because as we all know, dirt will always be there.

We have three beautiful children. Kristen, our first born, was involved in a fatal car accident in July of 2004. She was a beautiful, vivacious 25 year old woman with a zest for life. She lived a full life until the day she died. She taught me so much. I will always love her and pray for her. Our second child, David, is now 25 and works in the IT industry. He has a commercial airline pilot license and is building flight hours to someday work as a pilot. Our youngest child is 19 year old Karl who graduated from Lake Braddock High School and is presently attending Northern Virginia Community College.

Interestingly enough, one of my favorite pastimes is gourmet cooking. It's fun to create special eating experiences, especially desserts. Before medical school and children, Dave and I belonged to a gourmet cooking club. Gardening—especially flowers—is also one of my interests. I think that springs from my need to nurture. Lastly, I love to ride horses. That was something Kristen and I used to do together regularly.

You've started the Kristen Anderson Perinatal Hospice Program. Can you tell us more about it?

Dr. Anderson: In honor of our deceased daughter, we set up the Kristen Anderson Perinatal Hospice Program. This program was developed for women who have been given a life threatening fetal diagnosis and need support to make important decisions regarding the rest of their pregnancy and the baby's delivery.

We have set up multi-disciplinary teams including physicians, nurses, and counselors, who are specially trained to support women and their families by helping them access all of the medical, spiritual and emotional care that they may need. It is about medical care, but it is also about comforting, assisting and supporting the family all the way through their pregnancy—from diagnosis through post-partum—to help the healing begin.

We find this important as we see more and more women being put in a position to end their pregnancy if there is an

adverse diagnosis. We have discovered that ending the pregnancy not only causes more hurt, but also denies the family the chance for closure and a proper goodbye. Moms want to spend time with their children, especially when they are sick. This program helps moms and families to do just that. It gives them hope, and helps them to see the beauty of their ever deepening intimate relationship with Christ. We support women in their decision to carry out the pregnancy and get them the help they need.



Dr. Marie Anderson, Medical Director of Tepeyac Family Center, holds Charlie, a new arrival who joins her in giving a beautiful smile for the camera. Each year, Tepeyac delivers more than 550 babies and is the largest admitter to Fair Oaks Hospitals' labor & delivery department.

We've heard that you are expanding into the field of gyn (pelvic) surgeries to help women who have problems resulting from delivering babies. Can you tell us more about this?

Dr. Anderson: What initially attracted me to this field was delivering babies. As I have learned more and experienced the phases of womanhood myself, I have deepened my interest in gynecology. I have always enjoyed performing traditional gynecologic surgery, but as the field has evolved and new

techniques and equipment developed, I have undergone continued training in advanced surgical techniques.

Laparoscopy is a sophisticated, advanced technology which enables us to perform surgery through tiny incisions resulting in accelerated recovery.

Hysteroscopy provides a means to operate on the uterus without a skin incision at all. These are my special interests, and I am performing more and more of them. I also repair fallopian tubes, which have been damaged by tubal ligation. I thoroughly enjoy performing surgery to help God make people well.

You seem to be a favorite speaker at lots of public functions. Where do you speak and what other conferences and seminars do you participate in that would be of interest to the TFC family?

Dr. Anderson: I have spoken to multiple audiences in Virginia and in distant parts of the country including conferences for the Arlington Diocesan Council of Catholic Women, the U.S. Conference of Bishop's Pro-Life Committee, and banquets at conferences for medical professionals in Arizona, Kansas, and Wisconsin.

Recently, I taped a segment on the local (Fairfax, VA)

cable TV station, and I gave talks to students at Marymount University and Mary Washington College. I feel privileged to be part of the paradigm shift that is taking place at Tepeyac Family Center: to practice medicine using the Divine Healer as our model. I speak to people who want to know how and why we do this, those who want to learn about NFP, and those who are skeptical that this way of life can be successful in the OB/GYN arena.

Every week I still attend continuing education classes offered by the OB/GYN department at Fair Oaks Hospital. Many old friends (who knew me before my conversion) attend these classes and this forum provides an opportunity to witness to faith-based medicine. They are slowly beginning to acknowledge that there may be another way to do things. I educate as much as I can. Sometimes we agree to disagree. My continued presence there as a physician who practices in a growing, thriving, life-filled practice speaks volumes.

Is there anything else that you would like to say to the patients and friends of TFC? You could use this as a chance to talk about your concerns for the future of OB/GYN medicine or just discuss whatever is on your mind.

Dr. Anderson: After our daughter died, I honestly didn't know whether I could ever deliver a baby again. I was afraid my heart would break. Quite to the contrary, helping to bring new life into the world is what gives me hope. It gives me a reason to get up in the morning. I feel so privileged to receive the babies God is sending into His world. It reaffirms the love I will always have for Kristen.

I find it humbling that so many people are not only willing, but eager to help us at TFC become the focal point of Catholic health care in this diocese. It is truly a group effort. We rely heavily on programs such as Gabriel Project, Project Rachel and volunteers of all sorts. It amazes me that wonderful people come to our "painting parties" to help us make our office a beautiful place for us all to use. Our Gala committee works endlessly to put on a first class fundraising event annually. Volunteers organize our annual memorial service for women who have experienced an abortion, a miscarriage, or a stillbirth. We have a network of Catholic mental healthcare providers from which to draw. Where else is there such enthusiasm for a medical practice? I propose that there is no other place like Tepeyac, and

that is largely due to the countless people who have joined together to praise God by giving of themselves to do His work. I thank you all.

Faith based practice, where doctors treat patients as human persons with the dignity they deserve, is the future of medicine. So many of my colleagues are disheartened or "burnt out." Practicing with Jesus Christ as our role model is a breath of fresh air, to live our faith in every aspect of life. It is critical not only to patients, but even more so for us as doctors. To remove the barriers to God's action in us is truly liberating. That total openness to life brings such peace. It is priceless!

Pray for us all, that we can continue to work out this mission to serve our poor, our women in need, our faith filled women, and that we do this in order to restore the culture of life. We all have to work together to that end, it is that important.

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THEN YOU MUST HEAR
DR. MARIE ANDERSON'S CONVERSION STORY!

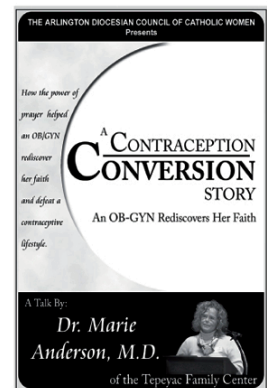
In this 55 minute DVD, you'll learn ...

- What remarkable woman sparked Dr. Anderson's desire to become an OB/GYN
- What medical and ethical situations challenged Dr. Anderson's faith
- And what Saint played a special role in her conversion

PLUS ...

- What mysterious "sign" finally convicted Dr. Anderson to embrace a pro-life OB/GYN practice
- What her first impression of Dr. Bruchalski was like
- How practicing excellent medicine makes her a better follower of Christ
- And how her conversion didn't stop once she came to Tepeyac ... **AND MORE!**

This inspiring story of a "cafeteria Catholic" who came to a greater awareness of her faith through medicine is truly thought provoking. Dr. Anderson's conversion story reminds us all of our own shortcomings as well as the marvelous gift of grace and power of intercessory prayer! Following Christ is hard but it is always rewarding. This DVD is a reminder that it's never too late to follow Christ!



For a suggested minimum donation of \$25, we'll send you a copy of Dr. Anderson's "Contraception Conversion Story" DVD.

For a donation \$100 or more, we'll send you five copies of Dr. Anderson's "Contraception Conversion Story" DVD that you can share with family, friends, physicians, pastors, prayer groups, public or parish libraries, RCIA groups or conferences for the engaged!

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