



Surrendering ego to let go and trust – God, and your colleagues

When things may look bleak in all directions on any given day, how do you find the way through?

Can you relate with embracing a mission to bring hope and health to engage and serve others in an environment that's been continually faced with setbacks and unkept promises?

These are some of the questions that invited all to attend the Tuesday, August 13th BELIEVES session on "Surrendering ego, and letting to trust – God and your colleagues," featuring Breanna Lathrop, Chief Operating Officer at Good Samaritan Health Center of Atlanta, and Veronica Squires, Chief Administrative Officer at Good Samaritan Health Center of Atlanta.



Good Sam's mission is to "spread Christ's love through quality healthcare to those in need," the speakers shared at the beginning.

"I've been at Good Sam for 10 years, and we just released a book focused on how social determinants of health impact community," said Lathrop.

Squires, whose daughter was going to kindergarten for the first time the following day, shared that research done by Virginia Commonwealth University led by Dr. Keri Norris had been done on communities in Atlanta.

"One of the most glaring things the research showed is that 13-year life expectancy gap between those who live in Bankhead and those who live in Buckhead," Squires said. "When more specific analysis of Census data is done between Vine City and Buckhead, the life expectancy gap is actually found to be 25 years."

Quoting Dr. Norris, Squires then stated, "Your zip code is more predictive of your life expectancy than your genetic code."

SO what causes the gap, and what interventions are needed?

“It’s not an issue of healthcare access. It’s more about social environment,” said Lathrop.

Squires gave an anecdote to illustrate, Lathrop’s point.

“We hopped in the Good Sam van one time and drove around. I was surprised there were no grocery stores, but 11 liquor stores in the Bankhead-Vine City community.”

Sometimes the stats can be jarring, said Lathrop.

“There’s a sense of being overwhelmed,” she added. “However, in last 8 months of talking with folks, I’m encouraged by the interest in the topic from all sorts of people.”



How do Lathrop and Squires believe the title and focus of the BELIEVES session – “Surrendering ego to let go and trust – God and your colleagues” – applies to the book the two recently co-authored – *How Neighborhoods Make Us Sick: Restoring Health and Wellness to Our Communities?*

Squires responded first.

“The biggest thing that comes to mind is partnership,” she said. “My story is my family lived in a low-income neighborhood growing up. The interventions in the community weren’t effective. In the 9 years we were there, my family felt the effects.”

Working at Good Sam has taught Squires the power of at least ‘2 by 2.’

“If you can get people in all walks singing the same song, working across sectors, there can be a collective impact. Obviously we look at things first from a health perspective. So the biggest thing is to find people to link arms with.”

Lathrop then remarked, “On ego, I think of how that’s an issue at a societal level. If we go into a neighborhood with an intervention mentality without understanding, we can do harm. What are we doing to challenge our worldview? I’ve been convicted of this a lot through my work. My thoughts on how I do my work have changed.”

Jim King, CTK parishioner, then asked, “Who has a model that works in the United States?”



Lathrop answered, “Two really jump out to me – Housing First in New York, and King County in Washington.”

Lathrop went on to explain how Housing First in New York came about, and how it uses housing as a starting point rather than an end goal.

“Dr. Sam Tsemberis is the founder of Housing First,” Lathrop said.

When Tsemberis thought about those he would see who were homeless he decided to look at Emergency room visit rates.

“He basically said, ‘I’m going to start asking the regular visitors to the emergency room questions to learn from them.’ What he found was many said, ‘Sure, I can go to another clinic, but I just need a place to sleep at night.’”

So Tsemberis and others then did a controlled trial to focus on housing first.

“They actually had to end the trial early because the results were so impactful that it was unethical to not let it spread beyond the trial,” Lathrop exclaimed. “Here in Atlanta, True Pathways just started in Atlanta with a focus on 25 people modeled after Housing First.”

As for the best practice of King County in Washington, their focus and efforts were different.

Lathrop recalled, “They asked the question, ‘How does every policy impact people through an equity review process?’ to see the impact on those who are marginalized. One result of all this was the importance of the decision from a community engagement standpoint to have the people being served to have a seat at the table.”

She then added, “One other thing noted in both of these situations is that the people who were the initial leaders are no longer leading. There has to be enough ego involved at the beginning to start it, but then the ego has to be let go.”



Lathrop and Squires were then both asked how prayer exists for each of them personally during the workday.

Squires answered first, saying, “For me, prayer is an internal processing. I feel I am a bit of an ‘impath,’ who can be very impacted by watching things, and a ‘fixer,’ who wants action. Prayer is about laying things back to the Lord – partly for my own mental health. Often when I am praying, I do so physically with my hands out. Prayer also opens my spirit and mind to hear something new – to listen to what God’s up to versus my own limited thoughts.”

Squires also reflected on something the leader of one of the previous organizations she worked at once said that’s stuck with her.

“When I worked at InterVarsity, the CEO said, ‘If you’re in ministry, you should spend at least 45 minutes a day listening to the Lord to be aligned.’”

Lathrop shared a few thoughts about the role of prayer for her personally and at Good Sam.

“For me, prayer is the great equalizer,” she said. “And then at Good Sam, every morning our staff does a devotional and each time it’s led by a different team member.”

As the session began coming to a close, the panelists were asked to share takeaways they’d like to leave with those in attendance.

Squires spoke first.

“Ask two questions – ‘What can I do to be healthy?’ and ‘What would help my neighbors to be healthy?’” Squires mentioned. “If you ask this second question, it might change the way we vote and act too. I would love to see Christians do this and see what happens. I hate when people say, ‘Jesus said we’ll always have the poor with us,’ because it’s some sort of acceptance.”

Lathrop then closed the session by laying out a three-pronged approach she’d recommend.

“Start with yourself – push to intentionally see perspectives other than our own,” she began.

The second prong -- Invest locally. Whether volunteering or giving money, find a long-standing organization to get invested in and engaged with for the long-term.

And Lathrop’s third prong?

“Find a way to get more civically involved to give voice for policies being made.”

