



1744 Payne Avenue
Cleveland, Ohio 44114
216-623-6555
TTY/TDD: 216-623-6540

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Dear Friends,

I have had a great career in community mental health. Nothing I have done, however, compares with what we have created at MHS. As Steve Wertheim, the head of First Call for Help, said to me, "MHS is not just the best community mental health agency, it's the best social service agency in our community." I have heard this over and over again as people have come up to me to say good-bye.

We have achieved this because of you. The depth of the talent of the staff we have at MHS – your intelligence, your commitment, your capabilities, your vision of what is possible for our clients, your hard work - is an inspiration to those we serve.

We have achieved this because of the courage of our Board of Trustees to expand the scope of our mission so that we may better serve our community. We also have to thank our Board for their courage to build a new headquarters for us. This was an enormous leap of faith, loaded with risk, to take about the future of MHS.

The many Board Presidents I have served over the years – Father Walter Jenne, John Urban, Julie Rittenhouse, Steve Prengler, Rich Robins – have been steadfast friends to me and to MHS through all of the ups and downs and triumphs of the last sixteen years.

We have achieved this because of the commitment of our government officials – the County Commissioners and the City of Cleveland as well as those in the Ohio Department of Mental Health – to fund services for the most needy. We should not take this for granted and need to be thankful for their confidence in MHS.

We have achieved this because of the great support we have had from the philanthropic foundations in our community.

We are recognized as leaders in our field nationally. It is not just the obvious things – the growth in our budget and the growth in our staff. It is how we have grown in understanding what we can do to transform the lives of our clients and help them realize their goals.

Preparing to leave - a very difficult task for me - has given me a new appreciation for all of what we have achieved over the years.

When I came to MHS in 1993 we had no accounting system and the person in charge of finances wasn't even balancing the checkbook.

I remember moving out of the warehouse offices at CSU and thought when we moved into the Bishop Cosgrove Center (thanks to Father Jenne and Catholic Charities) in 1995 that we'd never need all the space we were renting; how in 1995 we had only two months to start the Mobile Crisis Team and, four years later, only two months to start the Children Who Witness Violence program. (I used to say it was like opening a Broadway show without any rehearsals.) I also recall our excitement when we got our first federal grant that allowed us to open Safe Haven I.

Susan Neth has been a source of guidance and strength to MHS since its inception. From the day I arrived here sixteen years ago, she and I have been a team – she teaching me many things about leadership and relationships, me guiding her through her rise to the top ranks of the agency's management. She will be a wonderful leader of the agency after I depart, and I know I do not need to ask for your loyalty to her because I know she already has earned it.

I am very excited about my new job as Executive Director of the Cleveland Sight Center. I start there November 3rd. I will be on vacation the last two weeks of October. I wish you all the very best.

Steve