

# How A Mercy Adjunct Professor and Trustee Continued Teaching Through the COVID-19 Pandemic

By Michele Quirolo '79, '82

In 2019, after 24 years and much thought, I made the life changing decision to retire as the President and CEO of the Visiting Nurse Association of Hudson Valley. I can remember thinking about what life would be like after retirement and clearly, it was not what has transpired. There were no palm trees and pina coladas, but instead a very busy calendar with limited free time.

While I knew on some level that I would continue some of my previous activities within health care, things blossomed. I continue to serve as a Board Director for the Home Care Association of New York State which keeps me current with the industry. I sub-contracted my private consulting company with a national firm and found myself traveling across the country working with other home health and hospice organizations, and health care systems. The work has been rewarding, interesting and enjoyable. Learning how health care services are managed and provided in other states, and what I could do to make the system more efficient and cost effective was the part of my previous position I loved the most. This seemed like the perfect fit for me.

While consulting, I continued to teach online as an adjunct professor in the Nursing Department at Mercy College, something I have enjoyed since 2006, and also serve as a Trustee on Mercy's Board of Trustees. Rarely without a laptop, a hotel room and an internet connection, teaching anywhere is manageable and seamless for the students.

Enter COVID-19...life changed for all as we learned about our new normal and longed for the days of moving around freely, enjoying time



Michele helping her granddaughter, Megan, with her schoolwork.

Photo provided by Michele Quirolo

with friends and family, and having a meal in a restaurant. Schools and businesses moved to a virtual environment, including all of Mercy's courses, and I had my first Mercy Board meeting on Zoom. Thankfully my classes were already online so the transition was seamless for me, however for my students, it was a much different story. Many of my students were working unusually long hours, days and nights away from home and many became sick with COVID-19; some lost family members. Working and balancing a personal and school life with so many obligations is difficult under normal circumstances, add in this deadly virus and it is nearly impossible. During the spring semester, I kept in touch via text, email and phone calls with several students as they talked about their symptoms and fears about recovery while still worrying about assignments. Even though we have never met face to face, there was an unusual closeness that developed. I was humbled and privileged to be able

to be there for them.

New York's "Pause" stay-at-home order forced us to create new ways to avoid isolation, to stay connected with friends and family, and to limit our time out of the home. Restrictions on travel limited my ability to consult and a planned trip to Italy was put on hold.

Fortunately, a few years ago, my husband and I moved to live in a two-family house with my daughter and her family. We were not isolated and lonely, and home schooling our two grandchildren became our new normal. This was quite a challenge as our fourth-grade granddaughter learned geometry that I can remember I didn't learn until tenth grade. Our 11-year-old grandson helped translate unfamiliar information as we navigated "Common Core." It is like a foreign language! We happily created a color-coded Excel spreadsheet interspersed with Zoom meetings with school teachers.

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Throughout these challenges, I remain thankful as I am healthy and safe. While my view of retirement never looked like this, I am happy to be part of the Mercy College family. One thing learned from being on "pause" is that material things are less critical and having family, friends and health is paramount.