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CEO Michael Goar designing a vision for Sisters of Charity Health System's future

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REPRINTS



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St. Vincent Charity Medical Center campus

When Michael Goar started initial conversations with the Sisters of Charity Health System about coming on as the organization’s next president and CEO, he made one thing clear.

“If you're looking for a hospital administrator, I'm not it,” he said.

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Goar's background lies in education and nonprofit work. He previously served as CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters in the Twin Cities and has held leadership roles with Minneapolis Public Schools, Boston Public Schools and Memphis City Schools. His professional interests revolve around helping people experiencing economic hardships or mental health and chemical dependency issues, not running a hospital.

And as it turned out, that's exactly what the Sisters of Charity Health System was looking for in a leader. When president and CEO Janice Murphy **announced her intent to retire** earlier this year, the nonprofit said its next leader would be tasked with "developing an innovative strategy to ensure that the health system is well-positioned to continue to serve the community and carry on the mission of the Sisters of Charity in perpetuity."

That's the objective Goar has been focused on since he **took the helm** at the Sisters of Charity Health System this summer. The longstanding organization is in the midst of a major transformation, changing from a medical-centric entity to becoming more social service-oriented. It aims to become a convener of sorts, Goar said, facilitating partnerships, securing funding and collecting data to address persistent poverty in Central.

"While we're transforming in terms of the hospital going away, we have done a really great work of attracting great partners onto our campus," he said. "And we're leveraging our name recognition in St. Vincent and attracting other partners to do the similar work to serve communities."

The Sisters of Charity Health System, established in 1982 through the sponsored ministries of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine in Ohio and South Carolina, has undergone seismic changes over the years.



Sisters of Charity Health
System

Michael Goar

The organization once encompassed five hospitals, but it sold those other facilities while retaining the St. Vincent Charity Health Campus in Cleveland's Central neighborhood as it made the transition from acute care.

In 2022, St. Vincent Charity Medical Center ended inpatient care. It continued offering psychiatric emergency services until it shuttered that unit this past June. News broke this month that the former St. Vincent Charity Medical Center is slated for demolition early next year, a move the nonprofit said was necessary because of high maintenance costs associated with the aging facilities.

The nonprofit described the demolition of the ex-hospital building on East 22nd Street as a "pivotal step" in developing "a Health and Healing Hub" that will continue fulfilling the mission of the Sisters of Charity of St. Augustine in Central.

The conclusion of inpatient care at St. Vincent, combined with this year's shuttering of psychiatric emergency services, has raised some concerns about health care access in Central, one of Cleveland's most underserved neighborhoods. The mean household income in Central is \$23,941 compared to \$55,045 in Cleveland, according to a 2024 [fact sheet](#) produced by the Center for Community Solutions.

But Goar stressed that the organization is committed to Central.

"We are not going," he said. "We have never left. We're not leaving anytime in the near future. We see this as our home. This is our base of operations, and we're going to be very intentional about how we serve our Central neighborhood."

Today, the Sisters of Charity Health System has 473 employees in Northeast Ohio and South Carolina, 150 of whom work in the Central neighborhood. The organization's total assets exceed \$350 million.

Its services in Central include outpatient mental health services, primary care, pharmacy services and Mission Kitchen food services. It also operates Rosary Hall, an outpatient addiction treatment center, and Joseph & Mary's Home, a medical respite for individuals experiencing homelessness, and leads Cleveland Central Promise Neighborhood, a collective community impact initiative.

The nonprofit offers residential eldercare services at Regina Health Center in Richfield and Light of Hearts Villa in Bedford. It also has the Early Childhood Resource Center in Canton and Healthy Learners and the South Carolina Center for Fathers and Families in South Carolina. The health system also operates three foundations, in Cleveland, Canton and South Carolina.

The organization says nearly 500,000 people benefit annually, either directly or indirectly, from its programs, services and grants. For the first 11 months of this year, St. Vincent has seen more than 10,600 encounters with primary care, outpatient behavioral and addiction health services and Mission Kitchen, and more than 9,000 patients used pharmacy services.

Coming off the heels of the pandemic, Sisters of Charity knew it needed to make changes as the direction it was headed was not financially sustainable, Goar said. Medical institutions have faced significant headwinds since the pandemic due in part to rising costs and a tight labor market.

Since Goar stepped into the president and CEO role, he has been working with the organization's board, community members and other stakeholders to develop a vision for the Sisters of Charity Health System. Having the opportunity to lead this transformation was a huge draw for him.

"They wanted someone to come on board to design a vision for the future, what that might look like," Goar said. "Not often do you get this sort of blank canvas. You're given a job that someone used to do or an organization that someone developed and you want to make it better when you leave, but never something that does not exist whatsoever."

A key part of the organization's new strategy is partnership. Rather than provide certain health and human services, the nonprofit wants to attract high-performing partners to deliver quality medical care to the neighborhood.

One of these partnerships is with The Centers, a nonprofit provider of health care services, which purchased the former St. Vincent Charity Medical Office Building earlier this year. The organization plans to convert the facility into its new headquarters, which will feature a [crisis receiving center](#).

"Since the (hospital) closing was announced, we've been meeting with them pretty frequently to kind of think through how could we help fill some gaps in the neighborhood," The Centers president and CEO Eric Morse said.

Moreover, he said The Centers saw it as a great opportunity to expand in Central. The organization, Morse said, wants to help ensure the entire Sisters of Charity campus remains vibrant.

Goar said Sisters of Charity is also pursuing a partnership with Neighborhood Family Practice, a federally qualified health center, to bring services to the area. And the organization is looking at data it has acquired through community engagement to determine what other services or partnerships might be helpful for addressing the needs of Central.

"We are now in the process of designing a strategy to meet those needs," Goar said. "An example would be making sure that we have an opportunity for what I call connectors to go in to visit with families to figure out their needs. If there are needs for clinical care, we want to make sure that family is aware that we have a partnership with Neighborhood Family Practice or The Centers. And if there are issues about chemical dependency, of course, we have Rosary Hall."

Breaking the cycle of poverty, he said, also requires engaging with young people. As part of its transformation, Sisters of Charity wants to deepen its relationships with area schools, helping them secure resources and providing advocacy and volunteer support when needed.

"We think we can provide whatever assistance they might need to really enhance the educational experience for young people, which include creating before school programs, after school programs, creating summer programs for kids' enrichment," Goar said.

Ultimately, Goar envisions the future of Sisters of Charity to be focused on providing services driven through partnership and collaboration. He hopes the organization will engage with many partners and collect data on their work to measure its direct impact and address challenges they collectively face.

“We've been meeting with a lot of key stakeholders, a lot of community leaders to make sure we understand the greater needs, especially for me as a newcomer,” Goar said. “For me to build that relationship, for me to hear directly from their lips to my ears, the concerns they have. What we don't want to happen is overpromise and underdeliver. So we want to make sure there's a degree of intentionality.”



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