

DR. JOSEPH WOODRING '90

SENIOR MEDICAL OFFICER IV,
WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION

It can be daunting to pick up a family and move across the world, but for Dr. Joseph Woodring, a senior medical officer IV for the World Health Organization (WHO), the choice was clear.

In 2016, Joe moved to Manila, Philippines with his wife and two children where he assists 37 countries and areas in the Western Pacific by creating, representing, and advocating for hepatitis B vaccination programs, specifically for the transmission of the disease from mothers to newborns. "I have a huge responsibility for 25 percent of world's population that has 45 percent of all the global chronic hepatitis B cases and about half of global deaths from hepatitis B long term outcomes. I try not to get overwhelmed by it, but a lot of people are counting on me." Joe is also an active duty commander in the United States Public Health Service Commissioned Corps.

Joe was originally hired by the Center for Disease Control (CDC). From there, he was seconded to the World Health Organization due to the burden of disease in the Western Pacific. "For me it is a dream job. I never imagined that when I was thinking of going into the public health field that I would be working for CDC in my thirties, nor working for WHO in my early forties."

Joe's passion for helping others started at a very young age. As a child, his mother took him to soup kitchens to volunteer whenever he had a day off from school, while his father, an ear, nose, and throat doctor, introduced him to the world of medicine.

A year after he graduated with his bachelor's degree in biological sciences from Fordham University, Joe lived in India doing service work and research. Unfortunately, while he was there, a friend, whom Joe was caring for, passed away in his arms. At that moment, he made the decision that he needed to go to medical school. "These people are dying from diseases and I am so far down the food chain," Joe realized. "I am so far down the river and I have to travel upstream. I have to educate myself on these disease processes to be able to help people."

From there, Joe obtained his Masters of Public Health with an International Health concentration from Boston University, a Masters of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene from Uniformed

Services University of the Health Sciences, and a Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine from Touro University.

In 2014, when Ebola was at its peak, Joe knew that he had a responsibility to enter the field and help. "I've had close to fifteen years of education, so if I am not going to do it, who should do it?" Joe reflected. "This is the biggest thing since HIV. If I sit on the sidelines, I could never forgive myself. That is

my skill set. How can I not help?" In October of 2014, Joe was deployed to Liberia where he conducted surveillance, contact tracing, and data management of those who had been exposed to the disease. In April of the following year, Joe deployed again, this time to Sierra Leone for Ebola vaccine trials, training, and managing.

Joe started at Holy Child in PreKindergarten and is the youngest of five siblings to graduate from our School, along with Marie '80, Helene '82, Christa '83, and Andrea '87. "We had multiple decades of Woodrings at Rosemont," Joe said with a laugh.

Joe appreciates the faith foundation and commitment to service that he encountered at our School. "Having a faith-based educational background is very poignant for children. It makes them feel like they are a part of something bigger than themselves; it's not just them versus the world. They have shared beliefs and perspective. Holy Child definitely imparted that to me. My faith, even though it is not lived out in the typical going to church, is integral to who I am, how I express myself, how I view myself in the world, and what I view as service to others started with Holy Child."

Joe still has about seven years before retirement becomes a possibility, but he does not envision himself slowing down. He plans to continue to help those in need through the Commissioned Corps and the CDC. "I can see myself working for Doctors Without Borders or some international organization. I don't see myself retiring anytime soon, but I can see myself continuing with CDC and WHO or some kind of foundation that works with marginalized society." ❀



MANILA, PHILIPPINES

