

# The Ascension Weekly

March 4, 2018

## Dr. Kathleen Fenton, Pediatric and Congenital Heart Surgeon, Speaks at Ascension

On Thursday, February 15th, CAS+E (Catholic Association of Scientists and Engineers) hosted a talk by Dr. Kathleen Fenton, MD, a pediatric and congenital heart surgeon and co-founder of the William Novick Global Cardiac Alliance. The lecture, held at 7:30 pm in Bates Hall, was entitled, “Possumus! Changing the World one Child at a Time: A Catholic Surgeon Doing Humanitarian Work.” In her talk, Dr. Fenton spoke about her experience doing humanitarian work together with professionals of different religious beliefs to help needy children, and on the need for heart surgery for children throughout the world. She also elaborated on the lessons learned from her extensive international travels in her work as a heart surgeon.

Dr. Fenton grew up in Silver Spring, Maryland, the daughter of retired pharmacist Paul Fenton, longtime member of the Knights of Columbus and CAS+E. She completed her undergraduate studies at Johns Hopkins University and earned her medical degree cum laude at University of Maryland. She did her residency in general surgery at the University of Louisville, during which she took two years’ sabbatical to do full time research in fetal cardiac surgery with Dr. Frank Hanley. Following completion of her general surgery residency, she continued her education as a cardiothoracic resident at Emory University in Atlanta, followed by a fellowship in congenital heart surgery at University of California, San Francisco and a second fellowship with Dr. Frank Pigula at University of Pittsburgh. She held two academic positions in the United States prior to working full time with Dr. William Novick at the International Children’s Heart Foundation. For the past eight years, she has focused full time on international cardiac surgery, living primarily in Managua, Nicaragua.

In the past ten years, Dr. Fenton has traveled extensively in her work as a cardiac surgeon, to places as diverse as Central America, Libya, Turkey, Nigeria and Ukraine. As Dr. Fenton explains in the abstract of her lecture, “Working predominantly outside the United States for more than ten years fosters a greater love of one’s own country, while at the same time gives an appreciation for other countries and cultures. Having the opportunity to worship with Catholics in countries that range from those where Christianity is the

accepted, unquestioned norm to those where Christians are a small minority and those where religion had recently been outlawed, entirely offers a new perspective on the universality of the Church.”

The Cardiac Alliance, an organization founded in 2014 of which Dr. Fenton is a co-founder, works to educate, operate and support pediatric care around the world. It grew out of a foundation created in 1993 by Dr. William Novick to care for children with heart disease in the developing world. As stated on the Cardiac Alliance website, Dr. Novick “had seen the disparities in healthcare provision between children in the developed and developing world and had a vision that every child born with heart disease should have access to the care they needed to live a long and healthy life. As a pioneer in this field, he realized early on that helping local teams build and sustain a pediatric heart surgery service would be the only way to provide real hope to these many children and their families. In the ensuing 20 years, Dr. Novick and his teams worked in 46 cities in 32 countries, providing 7411 children with operations and medical care. Most countries received a sustained repeated pattern of assistance including 2 to 4 visits per year for at least 3 years, with 90% of such programs now performing independent pediatric cardiac surgery. The foundation is committed to helping bring sustainable health care solutions to children with cardiac disease in the developing world. They are dedicated to improving the skills, knowledge, technology and experience of local health-care providers in regions of the world without access to quality pediatric cardiac care. They aim to provide comprehensive care to all children with congenital or acquired heart disease regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, political ideation, genetic factors or economic means. The vision of the foundation is that in the future all children with heart disease, no matter where they are born, will be able to receive the medical and surgical care they require to live a long and healthy life.” ([www.cardiac-alliance.org](http://www.cardiac-alliance.org))

Dr. Kathleen Fenton, who has been working with the Novick Cardiac Alliance since its inception, is also a member of the Society of Thoracic Surgeons, where she serves on the Standards and Ethics Committee and the Joint Ethics Forum, as well as the Southern Thoracic Surgical Association and the World Society for Pediatric and Congenital Heart Surgery. She truly is an inspiration to us as Catholics, in her tireless commitment to bringing aid to those in need using the skills and talents given to her by God.