

Founding Physicians

And give the physician his place, for the Lord created him; let him not leave you, for there is need of him. There is a time when success lies in the hands of physicians, for they too will pray to the Lord that he should grant them success in diagnosis and in healing, for the sake of preserving life.

—Sirach 38: 12-14

Local Doctors Often Played Important Roles in the Creation of Catholic Hospitals

From its beginning, Catholic health care in the United States has involved collaboration between religious congregations and physicians to answer God's call to heal. Just as we celebrate the legacy of the ministry's founding women and men religious, so, too, we should recognize the important role played by its early physicians.



BY KIM VAN OOSTEN

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SUMMARY

Physicians have always been key contributors to the founding and success of Catholic health care facilities in the United States. Their contributions have ranged from working with clergy to attract a congregation of women religious to open a facility to raising funds for hospital buildings or donating medical equipment.

For a century and a half, doctors have partnered with women and men religious to improve the health and quality of communities. Pioneers in their own right, these physicians should be considered "physician founders" of the Catholic health ministry.

HERBERT ACUFF, MD

St. Mary's Health System, Knoxville, TN
St. Mary's is sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Silver Spring, MD.

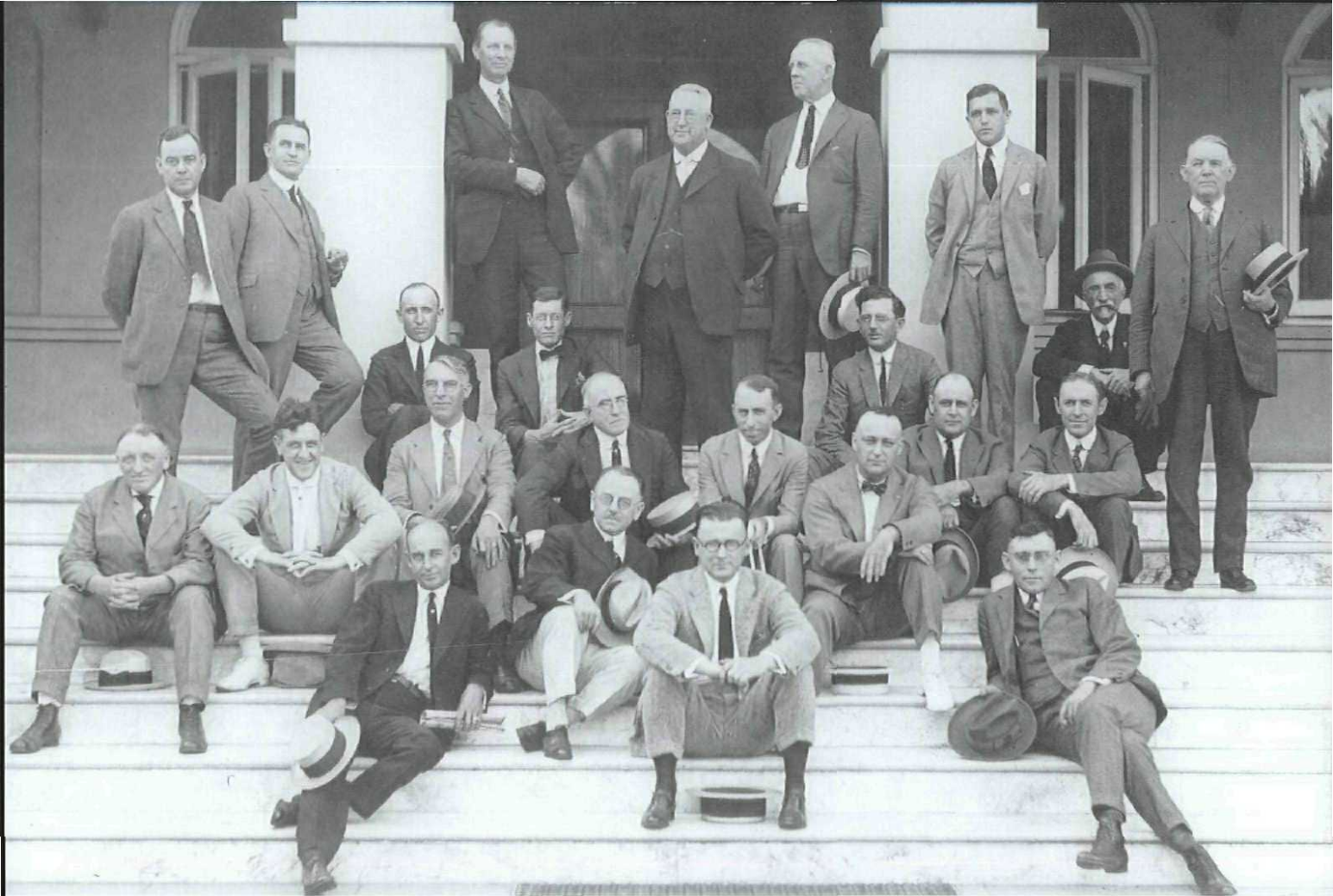
The facility traces its history to 1919, when a group of Knoxville physicians asked a local priest to open a Catholic hospital. Although no religious congregation was then willing to follow through on their suggestion, the idea was not lost. In fact, a parcel of land was donated for the project.

In 1927, the Sisters of Mercy, who had declined an earlier request, were again asked to establish and operate a Knoxville facility. Sr. Pauline Gray, RSM, and Sr. Mary Thomas Dauner, RSM, came to the city to discuss the proposal. Blanche Allison Darst, the wife of a prominent community member, introduced the sisters to local physicians. In a meeting on September 13, 1927, 60 doctors pledged their "moral support and also our financial support in so far as we feel able to do it to the successful promotion and establishment of this hospital."

St. Mary's Hospital opened April 20, 1930. By the end of the year, it had admitted 1,484



Dr. Herbert Acuff



The medical staff at St. Joseph's Home and Hospital.

patients; 931 surgeries had been performed there, and 160 babies had been delivered. The hospital's leaders declared that "all physicians of Knoxville and the surrounding territory who are in good standing with their respective medical associations are considered members of the visiting staff, and all the privileges of the hospitals are extended to them."

Herbert Acuff, MD, was St. Mary's first chief of staff. According to a history of the facility:

Herbert Acuff was born the son of a Baptist preacher in rural Grainger County. Educated first at Carson-Newman College and later in several institutions, both in this country and in Europe, the tall, slender, serious-eyed doctor was one of the most respected physicians in his era. He would found his own medical clinic and go on to help establish the Beverly Sanitarium (later known as the East Tennessee Tuberculosis Hospital). Dr. Acuff was a brilliant surgeon, specializing in cancer and abdominal surgery, and he wrote dozens of scholarly papers on these and other medical issues.

His service was so well-recognized that he was elected president of the International College of Surgeons. In that capacity he enjoyed an honor rare for the sons of rural Baptist preachers in Tennessee—in 1948, Acuff and a group of surgeons were received by Pope Pius XII while en route to a meeting in Italy.

Acuff was St. Mary's chief of staff for 21 years, a tenure several times longer than that of any other doctor who has held the position, and one ending only with his sudden death in 1951.

ELLIS HARBERT, MD

**St. Joseph's Medical Center of Stockton
Stockton, CA**

St. Joseph's is member of Catholic Healthcare West (CHW), San Francisco. It was originally conceived as a "home for old men" by Fr. William B. O'Connor, pastor of the city's St. Mary's Church. When, however, Ellis Harbert, MD, learned about Fr. O'Connor's plans, he suggested that the retirement home include a hospital wing. Harbert, a graduate of Vanderbilt University who had chosen to practice in Stockton, had found it difficult to use his surgical knowledge in the facili-

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Dr. John Franklin

ties then available.

Harbert was joined in his efforts to found a Catholic hospital by several colleagues: W. E. Gibbons, MD; William Young, MD; and Charles Harry, MD. All promised Fr. O'Connor that if he would add a hospital wing, they would bring their medical and surgical patients to it. Fr. O'Connor recognized the community need and set aside a wing of the proposed home for their use.

In December 1899, St. Joseph's Home and Hospital opened its doors under the supervision of the Dominican Sisters of the Most Holy Name, San Rafael, CA, who also staffed a school in Stockton. (The hospital was apparently the first venture into health care for the congregation, which is today one of CHW's several sponsors.) The facility's first medical staff was formed in 1915.

JOHN HERBERT FRANKLIN, MD

St. Margaret's Hospital, Spring Valley, IL
St. Margaret's is sponsored by the Sisters of Mary of the Presentation Maryvale, Valley City, ND.

In the early 20th century, Spring Valley, IL, was a coal-mining community with a population of 6,214. Working conditions in the mines were poor, and the government did little to protect miners from sickness or injury. The many accidents in local mines prompted a priest, Fr. John Power, pastor of the town's Immaculate Conception Church, to call for the founding of a hospital.

With the help of a local physician, John Herbert Franklin, MD, and others, Fr. Power sought a congregation of women religious to open and operate a Catholic hospital. In November 1903, the first seven Sisters of Mary of the Presentation, accompanied by a rooster and a hen, arrived in Spring Valley aboard a train. They went immediately to an unfurnished building that had been donated for a hospital. Franklin had been instrumental in persuading the sisters to undertake the project, and he also played a vital role in turning the building into St. Margaret's Hospital.

An article written at the time of his death in 1926 described his efforts to better the lives of area residents. "Dr. Franklin will long be remembered as an outstanding citizen and surgeon in the history of Spring Valley," the writer said. "He was a learned and able representative of the medical profession. He served the people of Spring Valley and surrounding towns from 1899 to until his death."

Another physician was also important in St. Margaret's early years. Matthew Coveny, MD, was noted in a journal kept by one of the sisters as an "early benefactor [who] set up the operating table and sent the first patients to the hospital." The sister writes that "one by one, other physicians of the city [sent patients]. Every surgeon and every physician performed operations or prescribed treatment, and from one visit to the other, left their patients under the sisters' care."

F. S. LUHMAN, MD; AND HENRY COAKLEY, MD

Holy Family Memorial Medical Center, Manitowoc, WI

Holy Family Memorial is sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc. When it was founded in 1881, it was called St. Mary Hospital.

F. S. Luhman, MD; and Henry Coakley, MD, were associated with the hospital in its early days. The two apparently had practices that covered large areas and required travel, because an article in the August 10, 1881, *Manitowoc Post* notes that "With us here for some weeks, Drs. Luhman and Coakley have taken care of 13 patients who happily recovered well, and within a short time because of the charitable services of the Sisters, were dismissed from the established hospital."

St. Mary lasted until 1888, when it was replaced by Holy Family Hospital, the forerunner of the present institution.

PHILIP M. SAVAGE, MD

St. Bernardine Medical Center, San Bernardino, CA

St. Bernardine is today part of CHW. Although many people can be counted among its founders, Philip M. Savage, MD, perhaps deserves the most credit. As the facility's official history notes:

There is no one person to whom we can point and say, that's the one who made St. Bernardine Hospital a reality, who had the idea, roused support, and ensured its construction. . . . Yet, if we must point to the time when the fuse of enthusiasm was lighted, it must be the moment a young surgeon stepped off an inbound train in downtown San Bernardino. When Dr. Philip M. Savage arrives home in San Bernardino following his sabbatical from a thriving medical practice to study at the famed Mayo Clinic in Rochester, MN, he returns as a man with a mission.

In Rochester, Savage had experienced the high level of care provided by the Franciscan Sisters who operated St. Marys Hospital there. That care, he noted, was not only medically superior to anything he had ever seen but also spiritually uplifting for both patients and physicians.

On returning home, Savage and Fr. Patrick Dunne, pastor of St. Bernardine Catholic Church, discussed the possibility of building a similar institution in San Bernardino. Support for their project came from local physicians, business people, and clergy, as well as from the archbishop of Los Angeles. Savage and Fr. Dunne began by

asking the Franciscan sisters in Rochester to come help them, but the request was declined.

In 1928, Fr. Dunne contacted Mother Mary Placidus, CCVI, superior general of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, Houston, (who already operated a hospital in Long Beach, CA), asking her to send sisters to visit San Bernardino to discuss opening a hospital there. The response was not positive. The sisters were not interested in another hospital in California, partly because they had already committed time and resources to the construction of a new facility in Texas.

Savage wrote to Mother Placidus himself, telling her that the proposed hospital already had \$50,000 in pledges and the promised support of 50 local physicians. Mother Placidus replied that \$50,000 was an insufficient amount of capital. The hospital's cost would probably be more than 10 times that figure, she said.

Fr. Dunne, having traveled to Houston to negotiate further, learned that the congregation was warming to his and Savage's proposal but wanted a \$150,000 local commitment and a suitable site. San Bernardino's physicians then increased their pledge to \$80,000, promised to donate a construction site, and launched a campaign to raise another \$100,000.

The fund-raising campaign had to be postponed while Fr. Dunne recovered from a bout of appendicitis. However, Fr. Charles B. Moulinier, SJ, president of what was then the Catholic Hospital Association, happened to be in California at the time. Joining the effort, he helped raise money by speaking to various San Bernardino groups.

Throughout 1929, the community worked to raise the promised funds. Savage traveled to Europe for a family trip, carrying with him a letter from Fr. Dunne asking that, in appreciation for his work on the hospital project, the doctor be granted a personal audience with Pope Pius XI. The request was granted. Savage returned to San Bernardino in time to be one of several people who signed a formal trust agreement to purchase the hospital site.

By early 1930, \$98,000 had been raised for the hospital. Mother Placidus traveled to San Bernardino to sign the papers to make her congregation's involvement official—the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word would commit



Founding Physicians

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more than a half-million dollars to build the facility.

The official groundbreaking occurred in August 1930. The hospital opened in October of the following year.

H. T. SUTTON, MD

**Good Samaritan-Genesis Health Care,
Zanesville, OH**

Good Samaritan-Genesis is part of Genesis Health Care System, Zanesville, which is sponsored by the Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity, Manitowoc.

The facility was established in the 1890s as Margaret Blue Sanitarium, funded by a local woman in memory of her daughter. Two physicians, one of them a young surgeon named H. T. Sutton, helped equip the facility.

The sanitarium was incorporated in 1895. Sutton, who became the corporation's secretary, soon closed his own private sanitarium and threw himself into the new enterprise.

Around 1900, Sutton decided that Zanesville needed a Catholic facility. With aid of Fr. A. L. Leininger, pastor of St. Nicholas' Church, the sanitarium board proposed to Mother Alexa, superior general of the Franciscan Sisters of Alverno, WI, that her congregation operate Margaret Blue (the sisters already conducted a parish school in Zanesville). The congregation agreed to do so.

A paragraph in the facility's official history, written in the 1920s, described the transfer of

ownership: "It must have been an interesting sight, that meeting in Dr. Sutton's office, 25 years ago, before women were as prominent in all sorts of public positions . . . of five simple sisters and the five trustees of the sanitarium!"

The five secular Margaret Blue board members resigned, and the five sisters took their place. A formal dedication ceremony was held in the spring. According to an article in the *Zanesville Columbian* of May 1, 1900:

The opening of the Margaret Blue Sanitarium as a city hospital in the charge of the Franciscan Sisters will always be remembered by the people of Zanesville as one of those events which influence the history of a city.

The need of such an institution had long been felt in Zanesville, and when, a few months ago, the proposal was made to transfer the hospital from the committee in whose hands it has been for several years a private sanitarium, to the charge of some Sisterhood who would open it to the public, Protestants and Catholic alike warmly espoused the undertaking.

Sutton served more than 25 years as president of the facility's staff. Margaret Blue Sanitarium was later renamed Good Samaritan Medical Center before, in 1997, becoming part of the Genesis system. ■