

St. Elizabeth Medical Center

Founded: 1875

Location: Tenth and Cincinnati Streets, Lafayette (1875–76); 1501 Hartford Street (1876–)

The roots of St. Elizabeth Hospital extend to Germany, where in 1860 Mary Teresa Bonzel founded the Congregation of Poor Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration to serve the needs of children and to aid the sick. In the early 1870s Otto von Bismark attacked all Catholic activities in Germany in his attempt to bring every movement, including churches, under the control of the state. Fearing that her order would not survive, Sister Mary Teresa sent six sisters from her group to the United States to establish an American motherhouse and to open a hospital. Bishop Joseph Dwenger of Indiana happened to be traveling in Germany at the time and in a meeting with Sister Mary Teresa convinced her to place the American motherhouse in Lafayette. He arranged for Lafayette businessman G. H. Moning to pay for the transportation costs of the six sisters.

Sisters Agatha, Bonaventure, Rose, Augustine, Alphonsa, and Clara, who acted as Mother Superior, arrived in an overcast Lafayette on 14 December 1875 without fanfare or a proper welcome. None of the women spoke English, but they happily found a German-speaking policeman to aid them on their first night. The next morning the sisters began buying material for a hospital and asked the community to help provide bedding, blankets, coal, wood, and food. A local committee helped the sisters pick out and pay for the beds and fixtures and secured a building from a Mrs. Loges, on the corner of Tenth and Cincinnati Streets, to serve as a temporary hospital. Before the end of the month the

sisters were ready to accept patients. Hospitals at the time were considered charity wards for the poor and were forgotten by most of society. If one was ill the only proper place for the individual was at home, to be cared for by family, friends, and the family's doctor.

While St. Elizabeth was located on Cincinnati Street, Dr. John J. Gasser became semiofficially attached to the hospital. He owned a drugstore across the street and often visited the hospital to inspect the work done by others, a practice that annoyed many of the other doctors. The first regular staff was not appointed until 1880, and until then many of Lafayette's prominent physicians aided the sisters in their work. The first official group consisted of four doctors, each pledged to three months of service. Their duties were to attend to the unattached charity cases. To help feed patients, the order worked a farm in the Lafayette area, canning the vegetables and fruits grown on the land for use in the hospital. Meanwhile, plans for a permanent site for a hospital developed rapidly. Albert Wagner donated four lots on Hartford Street, and the cornerstone of a new hospital was laid 11 June 1876. On 19 November of the same year the new 50-bed facility officially opened.

As the number of patients increased, so did the demand for more doctors and for specialized care. In 1882 the staff was increased to six. At that time no doctor was officially a specialist, and almost all of them performed surgery, general practice work, and other activities that would by the early twentieth century be done by specialists. In 1901 the hospital hired its first anesthesiologist then two years later added a psychologist and physical therapist. In the 1920s a doctor knowledgeable in the area of the eye, ear, nose, and throat joined the staff, as did a dentist. As more specialties developed

throughout the twentieth century, new doctors were placed at St. Elizabeth to handle the need.

Patient information in the early years was recorded in a single book. Orders for care and for medicine were transmitted orally, which sometimes led to confusion and poor care. As the years passed, staff doctors got into the habit of keeping their own notebooks in the drug cabinet, which they took with them on rounds to remind them of patient histories. As time progressed the hospital adopted more modern techniques. Until 1919 the hospital staff did not have officers and did not hold any scientific meetings. When St. Elizabeth's management decided to apply for approval by the American College of Surgeons, the hospital adopted the most modern classifications, procedures, and activities available at that time. For its efforts the hospital received a Class A rating from the college.

As demand and the number of patients grew at the hospital, the sisters turned away from other related charity work. The order stopped providing home nursing care in 1879. The sisters were not always able to help all of those who came to their doorstep either, usually because of a lack of space. To ease the situation somewhat, an east wing, facing Hartford Street, was added in 1879 and a west wing was constructed in 1883. In late 1896 the last touches were added to what would become known as the main hospital, a central section facing Fourteenth Street. The new four-story structure, opened in January 1897, came equipped with an operating room and modern appliances and was wired for electricity. Even with the additions, shortly after the main hospital was completed, admissions outnumbered the available bed space, and the sisters were forced to give up their own rooms. In 1905 the sisters moved into a new Gothic-style convent,

which included a large chapel and a few patient rooms. Local businesses, doctors, chapter organizations, and the Lafayette Fire Department paid most of the costs for the construction of the convent.

Along with the main hospital project, the sisters launched a school of nursing for the order, with classes taught by Purdue University faculty and local doctors. Lay students were not admitted to the school until 1937, when the demand for nurses could not be met by the order alone. The school continued to graduate nurses into the 1970s.

In 1921 the original section of the hospital was picked up and moved to the back of the property and turned into a contagious disease wing, separate from the rest of the hospital. In 1969 Sister Sybilla remembered taking care of patients with smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, polio, and other contagious diseases of the time. She never caught any of the diseases, and at one point she even cared for three babies who slept with her because of a lack of space in the maternity ward, while their mothers were patients in the contagious disease wing. The removal of the old section allowed the hospital to add a new wing facing Hartford Street that was completed in August 1922. The contagious diseases building continued to be used until 1960. It was demolished nine years later.

After World War II, St. Elizabeth expanded its services, adding a physical therapy department in 1950. Twelve years later the hospital needed more space and added a 109-bed wing. A decade later demand for space again forced the hospital to expand, first with a seven-story addition, then with another six-story structure in 1975. Growing expectations of hospital care led the administration to add an intensive care wing in 1978

and an open-heart surgery team in 1980. By the end of the 1980s new birthing rooms had opened and a new outpatient care facility had been built on Sixteenth Street.

The 1990s did not slow down the expansion of the hospital. In 1993 construction began on a \$4.5 million, five-hundred-space parking garage and a \$5.5 million emergency wing. By 1995 the hospital entertained merging with Home Hospital of Lafayette, and the order also considered selling the complex to Primary Health Systems of Wayne, Pennsylvania, but neither activity received approval from all parties. Over the years the hospital's mission has been one of trying to comfort and treat the sick, a mission it has continued since its founding. The center has participated in several clinical trials since 1875, including the testing of an AIDS virus treatment produced by Lafayette-based HemoCleanse, Incorporated, in 1996. In the mid-1990s officials at the hospital created Camp Bluebird, Indiana's first adult cancer camp, to meet the medical and psychological needs of patients.

By 1960, 14 sisters helped as administrators at the hospital, while 500 full- and part-time employees and 161 doctors cared for the sick. By the end of the decade growth had expanded the hospital to 373 beds and 800 employees. The order eventually moved from Lafayette, but it continued to run the hospital with the aid of lay personnel until January 1999. The order then merged with the management group of Home Hospital to form Greater Lafayette Health Services, Incorporated, in which the sisters have a 50 percent interest. In 1999 Sister Jane Marie Klein was president of the Congregation of Poor Franciscan Sisters of Perpetual Adoration. Douglas W. Eberle, the former president of St. Elizabeth Hospital, acted as the chief operating officer and executive vice president of St. Elizabeth Medical Center, and John R. Walling was the president and chief

executive officer of Greater Lafayette Health Services, Incorporated. On the eve of the twenty-first century, St. Elizabeth Medical Center employed 1,400 people in the Lafayette area and had 250 doctors on staff.