

St. Joseph Medical Center

Founded: 1869

Location: Corner of Broadway and West Main Streets, now 700 Broadway (1869–)

In 1865 German-born Bishop John Henry Luers of the Fort Wayne Roman Catholic diocese began pushing for the construction of a hospital in the city after witnessing a smallpox outbreak. In order to staff the proposed hospital, Luers looked to the village of Dernbach in Germany and sought a contingent of nuns from the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ. For the hospital itself, Luers turned his attention to Rockhill House. Fort Wayne pioneer William Rockhill had built Rockhill House on the corner of Broadway and West Main Streets to be a grand hotel that would prosper as residents moved to the northwest. The sixty-five-room hotel, which opened in 1854, had failed, however. The Fort Wayne diocese purchased it from Rockhill's heirs in 1869 for \$20,000. (Money was donated by the citizens of Fort Wayne; half of the purchase price came from the Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ.) In August 1868 eight Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ arrived in Fort Wayne and took up residence at St. Joseph's Church in Hessen Cassel. On 4 May 1869 three of them—Sisters Rosa, M. Matrona, and M. Henrica—opened St. Joseph Hospital.

During the first year of operation, the hospital had twenty patients. The Poor Handmaids also cared for people in their homes, keeping sixty-one night watches for the sick. Patients at the hospital paid \$6.00 per week for their care. Beginning in 1870 the city paid St. Joseph Hospital to care for the poor. By 1871 the hospital treated 243 patients. In 1884 a chapel and expanded living quarters were built; the Poor Handmaids

also used the location for their motherhouse. In 1892 and 1893 a wing was added to the hospital and in 1896 a fourth floor with an operating room. An X-ray department and criminal detention rooms were added in 1913. In 1918 the hospital opened a school of nursing (which closed in 1988). A seven-story wing was completed along Berry and Van Buren Streets in 1929, which resulted in the hospital entrance facing Berry Street. By that point the hospital's staff included thirty-five sisters, five registered nurses, and eighty-five students.

St. Joseph Hospital expanded steadily after the 1960s. Another major renovation took place between 1964 and 1966, once again moving the entrance of the hospital, this time to Broadway Street. In 1974 the hospital opened the region's most advanced burn center, and six years later the hospital added a five-story addition on Main Street. By that year the hospital had 487 beds. In 1986 the hospital was renamed the St. Joseph Medical Center. Its administrators focused on developing services in niches not served by area health providers: burn treatment, wound care, hyperbaric medicine, and sleep disorders. In 1994 doctors performed the first permanent transplant of human cadaver skin from one donor to another. In 1990 St. Joseph Medical Center opened the Dupont Medical Center for outpatient treatment on the city's north side. In addition, the hospital operated three StatCare emergency care centers in the city. In accordance with its original mission of serving the poor, the hospital supported Matthew 25, a free clinic for the poor, and conceived the idea of free immunization days for the needy, called Super Shot Saturdays, which it offered in conjunction with the city's other hospitals. It was also the anchor tenant of the Lafayette Medical Center at Lafayette and Pontiac Streets, which provided a variety of services, including pediatric care, in a low-income

neighborhood of the city. In 1993 St. Joseph Medical Center provided \$12 million in unpaid care to the poor.