St. Vincent Hospital & Health Services

Founded: 1881

Locations: East Vermont Street (1888–89); South and Delaware Streets (1889–1913);
Fall Creek Parkway (1913–74); 2001 West 86th Street (1974–)

St. Vincent Infirmary was founded by Sisters Mary Theresa O'Conner, Oswald
Spaulding, Albertine Ott, and Magdalen Kelleher in 1881. The women were members of
the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul, a religious order dating to the
seventeenth century in France and established in the United States by St. Elizabeth Ann
Seton in 1809. Bishop Francis Silas Chatard of Vincennes requested that the Daughters
of Charity come to Indianapolis in 1878. Chatard and another priest established St.
Joseph's House for the Sick in a vacant seminary adjacent to St. Joseph's Church on
Vermont Street. When the four Daughters of Charity finally arrived in April 1881, they
established the St. Vincent Infirmary with $34.77 they brought with them and a $50.00
grant from Chatard. It was incorporated by the state legislature in 1884.

There had long been much opposition to a Catholic hospital due to anti-Catholic
prejudice, but that sentiment had nearly subsided when St. Vincent's was established.
The Daughters of Charity, who were willing to care for anyone regardless of religion or
income, gradually won broad community support. The nuns served as nurses,
administrators, and housekeepers, and they did all the work of the hospital, including
cooking, cleaning, repairing mattresses, and manufacturing linens. In addition, the nuns
gardened and raised livestock, milked cows, churned butter, and gathered eggs. In 1885
Dr. Joseph W. Marsee became the first house physician. He was paid twenty-five dollars

per month but often returned this wage to the hospital. The original infirmary had no operating room. Surgery was performed at bedside or on tables behind partition screens.

In 1889 the St. Vincent Infirmary moved to South and Delaware Streets, near the railroad yards and stockyards, the area from which most of the hospital's patients came. Nine sisters worked at the hospital, which could accommodate 150 patients. In the early 1890s the infirmary charged $5.00 for medical and $6.00 for surgical cases. Private rooms cost from eight to eighteen dollars per week. The sisters' regimen could be strict. According to a 1909 list of rules, patients who were well enough were required to be out of bed in time for breakfast and to leave the area so that the wards could be swept and put in order. The patients were to make their own beds and be dressed and sitting in chairs at the ends of the beds for the physicians' daily rounds. The Daughters of Charity converted rooms on the fourth floor into a nursing school, which opened in 1897. They also rebuilt and enlarged their surgical amphitheater for observation by students from the Medical College of Indiana and the Central College of Physicians and Surgeons.

In 1913 the infirmary moved to a new building on the grounds of the old Fairbanks Garden Park on Fall Creek Parkway between Capitol and Illinois Streets and became St. Vincent Hospital. The first baby delivered at the hospital was named Vincentia Connor in its honor; she later graduated from St. Vincent's School of Nursing. The nurses' residence, laboratories, and classrooms were located in the hospital proper until 1927, when a separate building was completed. The school of nursing closed in 1970.

St. Vincent Hospital moved to a new facility at 2001 West 86th Street in 1974. In addition, St. Vincent began operating St. Vincent New Hope, a residential rehabilitation

center for young adults with acquired or congenital disabilities, in 1978; the St. Vincent Stress Center, offering care in mental health and chemical dependency as well as a hospice, in 1982; and the St. Vincent Family Life Center, including a maternity clinic, in 1984. A 100-bed satellite hospital opened in Carmel in 1985. In 1952 Dr. Arthur Richter opened a heart clinic at St. Vincent Hospital. The hospital later became the first in the area to have coronary care and intensive care units. In 1986 St. Vincent Hospital became the fourth in the state to offer heart transplants. By the 1990s St. Vincent Hospitals & Health Service provided health care to 150,000 patients annually and employed over 5000 personnel, including a staff of 1000 physicians.