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Christ Hospital and Medical Center History: 1906-1996

Advocate Aurora Health

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CHMC HISTORY

- 1906 Rev. Ott sent a call to the congregations of the Evangelical Church to organize a deaconess society. Sept. 1906—\$10 to apply for charter.

Organizational purpose—"to maintain and support a hospital and deaconess home in which sick are nursed by educated and trained deaconesses and in which deaconesses receive training."

The role of the Deaconess Society was significant. The Deaconess Society offered educational opportunities to women and opened doors to service, stability and professional development. Nursing was one of the few honorable professions open to women at that time. The nursing school continued to be a vital part of the Evangelical Hospital and Christ Hospital program for many years.

The nurses were spirited young women. Water fights became a tradition in the school. One fight became so passionate that water cascaded down the stairs of the building. The dorm had to be closed for two weeks to repair the damage. Water fights were banned after that.

- 1910 Fall of 1910, cornerstone of 2-story hospital laid at 54th and Morgan in Chicago. 60 beds. Total cost was \$19,950.18. Was called the German Evangelical Deaconess Hospital.
- 1911 Opened in August 1911. By end of year in 1911, 177 patients were treated, 6 babies born, total income \$3,553.51.
- 1918 Private room rate \$21 a week; semi-private beds \$17 a week. Included room, board, services of the floor nurse and intern. The start of WWI and the declaration of war by the United States on Germany prompted the hospital to drop the German reference from its name. Now was Evangelical Deaconess Hospital.
- 1923 26,755 patients had been treated; 2,950 babies born. Income was \$133,141.15.
- 1931 Lest anyone think that gang violence is a recent phenomenon....Mrs. Frieda Felsch tells a dramatic story of the time. "We had a gangster in the hospital under an assumed name. He came in with a gunshot wound in his leg and was in a private room. His enemies came up the back stair, fired through the door at him and a bullet grazed the top of his head. It looked as if someone ran a barber's clipper over his scalp. He wasn't hurt and returned fire with a revolver he had under his pillow. His assailants ran out the back door.
- 1933 Nurses worked at the hospital six and a half days a week for \$25 a month.
- 1940 Expanding need required physical expansion—expanded to acquire entire frontage along

Morgan between 54th St. and 54th Place.

- 1950 Interest in expanding into another community was growing. Many of the people originally served by Evangelical Hospital had moved into the southwestern suburbs. Plans began to build another hospital in Oak Lawn. The intention was to continue to operate Evangelical Hospital along with the new hospital.
- 1955 20 acres in Oak Lawn were purchased. Formerly a drive-in.
- 1959 Cornerstone laid on Sunday, September 20.

There was some controversy over the name of the hospital. Rev. Karl Meyer, the first administrator of the hospital, had picked out the name "Good Samaritan." However, at the annual meeting of the member churches one of the pastors proposed maintaining the denominational identity by calling it "Christ." The member churches unanimously approved the motion. The Board and the physicians objected but simply changed the name to Christ Community Hospital. Later, "Community" was dropped from the name because it was felt that it would deter the better medical residents from seeking placement here because it would be perceived as a second-rate or community hospital.

- 1961 Building dedicated in March, 1961 with 195 beds. There were no intensive care rooms. ER had 8 cubicles and was covered in 12 hour shifts by all medical staff and by Cuban refugees who had to serve as interns for a year to qualify for licensing in the US.

Women from Emmanuel United Church of Christ in Evergreen Park sewed the drapes for the new hospital. Karl Meyer purchased the fabric and thread and the women brought their portable sewing machines and a production line was set up in the church basement—cutting, basting, sewing. Two sets of drapes were made for each room, so that one would be hanging while the other was being laundered.

Volunteers and members of the church organizations came in to the new hospital and cleaned, put up the drapes, unpacked boxes of supplies and set up the rooms.

Sunday school classes from local churches gathered nickels and dimes to pay for the cross that still sits on top of the hospital.

Rev. Karl Meyer, the first administrator at Christ Hospital, was well known for his devotion to the hospital. It was not uncommon to see him walking the hallways at 10 or 11 at night to make sure that everything was going as it should. He knew many of the workers and was knowledgeable about almost everything that happened in the hospital.

- 1972 Once Christ opened, physicians began admitting their patients to Christ instead of Evangelical Hospital. Also, the neighborhood had become largely African American and it was felt that the United Church of Christ's role in the community had changed. The Evangelical Hospital was sold to the Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church. It was the first black-administered, religiously based hospital in the country.

Later, the United Church of Christ renewed its commitment to the health of the black community by opening the Woodlawn Hospital, Bethany Hospital and Trinity Hospital. Good Shepherd and Good Samaritan Hospital were also part of this system of hospitals that became known as the Evangelical Health Systems.

- 1975 Christ Hospital was growing at an amazing rate. The bed number was up to 616. The original 4 story building had expanded to 9 floors. In 1975, the 9 story South wing was added to bring the count to 809. The parking tower was also added.

One of the controversies during this time was who would administer the hospital. Until this point, ministers had been the administrators and had also served as chaplain for the hospital. However, ministers were not necessarily equipped to run an institution the size of Christ Hospital. The by-laws were thus changed to allow someone other than a minister to be the chief executive. The chaplain department grew once this shift occurred.

- 1988 The School of Nursing closed. College based nursing programs had become the more accepted form of nurses training and it was no longer feasible for the program to continue.
- 1994 By 1994, the Christ Hospital campus had expanded to include a physician's pavilion, southwest OB and ICU wing, and a new emergency room. Also in 1994, the surgical pavilion was opened with 21 operating rooms and a surgical and neurological intensive care unit.
- 1995 Evangelical Health Systems joined with the Lutheran Health System to become Advocate Health Care.
- 1996 Hope Children's Hospital opened.

Marty Ozinga, one of the founding board members and an on-going supporter of Christ Hospital says, "Christ Hospital, to me, meant an institution of mercy to serve the sick and the injured, and to do it with the love of Christ, compassion, love and concern."