

# THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES OF OUR LADY HEALTH SYSTEM

## A BRIEF HISTORY

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## FOREWORD

Catholic communities of Sisters devoted to caring for the sick were instrumental in developing the hospital system in America. The achievements are many and the sacrifices they made were often unbelievable. Perhaps, one of the most famous was the ministry of Mother Marianne of Molakai, a member of the Sisters of St. Francis. She gave herself in service to the lepers of Hawaii, serving for 29 years until her death.

Through the efforts of communities of Catholic Sisters, one or more hospitals were developed in every major city of the U.S. The first group to arrive was the French Ursulines who came to New Orleans in 1727. They opened the first Catholic hospital in New Orleans in 1728. Countless communities of Catholic Sisters followed them. Few Sisters are famous. Most Sisters lived and died obscurely, secure in their belief in Our Lord Jesus Christ, giving themselves freely and willingly to the care of the sick.

The Franciscan Sisters of Calais, the subject of this publication, came to the U.S. in 1911. The publication is a brief history of their ministry in Louisiana. Through their efforts, they provide a resounding answer to the question: “How do you open and successfully manage a hospital when you have no resources other than your own expertise?”

### THE FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES OF OUR LADY - ORIGIN

The Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, one of the many orders of Sisters operating throughout the world and in the United States of America, began in 1854 when seven autonomous groups of Franciscan Sisters in France banded together. The group received a document of affiliation with the Franciscan First Order, and were named the Franciscan Sisters of Calais.

Under the leadership of Mother Louise Mabile, the first Superior General of the Order, the congregation grew rapidly. During the first ten years, 175 postulants were received, 115 novices were admitted, and 12 new convents were opened.

With the impetus of a rapidly growing organization, the Franciscan Sisters of Calais expanded into Europe, Asia, and North and South America. The United States group, organized and operating solely in Louisiana, began in 1911 when six Franciscan Sisters arrived in response to a request from Bishop Van de Ven. Two years later in 1913, St. Francis Sanitarium was opened in Monroe.

In 1921, the Franciscan Sisters were invited to open a sanitarium in Baton Rouge. Our Lady of the Lake Sanitarium was dedicated in 1923.

Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette was opened in 1949 in response to an invitation from Bishop Jeanmard.

The Franciscan Sisters of Calais followed in the footsteps of St. Francis of Assisi (1182-1226), a gentle saint who left a life of riches to preach the gospel and serve the sick and the needy. The sisters of the Franciscan Third Order were first linked with hospitals during the mid-13th century in France. In subsequent years, they spread out across Europe, building schools, convents, hospitals and orphanages. The centuries brought the Order many hardships, but neither wars nor religious persecution dimmed the love, faith and hope that called these women to the sisterhood. The Franciscan Sisters of Calais numbered about 800 members in 36 houses in France as well as 24 mission countries when the Sisters came to Louisiana.

They remained strongly committed to serve all of God's people with love and devotion. Through the centuries, they have reached back to the words written by St. Francis of Assisi:

"Blessed are you who love your brother and sister  
as much when they are sick and are of no use to  
you as when they are well and can be of use to you."

As the statement attests, the spirit of the congregation is rooted in Franciscan spirituality, love for Christ crucified, the Holy Eucharist, devotion to the Blessed Mother and the spirit of poverty, simplicity, faith and prayer. It epitomizes the Franciscan "way" as taught by St. Francis and his followers. It expresses the teachings of Vatican II on religious life for our day and time.

Presently, 145 years later, the congregation of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady continues to respond to God's call and the needs of the Catholic Church.

#### Brief History

On April 10, 1854, Napoleon II, Emperor of France, signed the Decree that gave legal status as a religious institution to the newly founded congregation, Franciscan Sisters of Calais. The new order was formed from seven independent French congregations as follows:

St. Omer, dating back to 1377  
Aire-Sur-la-Lys (founded in 1429)  
Montreuil (founded in 1455)  
Bethune (founded in 1495)  
Lens (founded in 1555)  
Arras (founded in 1556)  
Calais (founded in 1807)

Each of these convents was autonomous. Because of the chaos of the earlier revolution in France, replete with fanatical anti-religious madness, the groups experienced a need to unite.

The convents were located in the Diocese of Arras in Northern France. In 1851, Bishop Pierre Louis Parisis was appointed to the diocese. He soon perceived the sad predicament of the seven convents and took steps to remedy the problem. The Bishop, with the help of Pere Duchene, united the seven groups in a simple act. Each Sister declared her wish to become united with the Franciscan Sisters of Calais. The Sisters of Calais, in turn, signed an act of acceptance of the other Sisters.

The new congregation was formed in 1854. A new habit was adapted, and the ngroup became known as the Franciscan Sisters of Calais, following the Rule of St. Francis of Assisi, Third Order Regular. Mother Louise Mabile was appointed as the first Superior General.

The first novitiate was opened in Calais in 1855 with three postulants and began a period of growth and development of the Order. By 1892, it had achieved sufficient growth and status and received final approbation from Rome, some 25 years after the first request for approval.

Before the Congregation was 50 years old, it had grown from the original seven houses operating in one diocese, to over 50 houses spread over France and 14 different countries. Of particular note was that the religious persecution in Portugal at the turn of the 20th Century provided an impetus for the Franciscans to establish its first North American house in Monroe, Louisiana, the beginning of the North American Province. Six Sisters were assigned to this mission.

In 1964, the name of the Congregation was changed from the Franciscan Sisters of Calais to the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. This change, in line with the many changes in the Catholic Church through Vatican II, brought the mission of the Franciscans into clearer focus. The new name highlighted strongly the international focus of their mission, and that the Sisters were serving not only in their home countries but in many other lands as well.

Vatican II also brought with it a significant change in the operation of the Order. Prior to that time, the organizational structure of the Church was hierarchial, with administrative authority to appoint and/or change the leader or Superior of the Order. She, in turn, had the authority to appoint the religious Superiors of the various communities. As a result, Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley was appointed by the General Superior of the Order at the time, Mother Marie Anna, to head the Louisiana group of Sisters.

Vatican II and subsequently new Constitutions changed the procedure. The democratic process was implemented, giving subsidiary units the power to select their leaders by election and to provide for active participation of the members of the group in decision-making. Beginning in 1978, the North American Province began to elect its leadership and to provide for active participation in the decision-making process within the Congregation. In 1976 the North American Region was changed to a Province with Mother Gertrude Hennessy who was Regional Superior assigned as Provincial Superior.

The first elected Provincial Superior was Sr. Brendan Mary Ronayne.

## The Sisters

In one way or another over 140 Franciscan Sisters have participated in the growth and development of the North American Province. The Sisters who led the Order from its headquarters in France had an impact through the Sisters they missioned to Louisiana. In the earlier days, they appointed the Sisters who directed the work. They assigned Sisters to serve on the hospital staffs, and they exercised general supervision over the work of the Sisters, visiting from time-to-time to inspect what was being done in Louisiana.

Incidentally, three Sisters from the North American Province have served on the General Council in France at one time or another: Sr. Jerome Crowley, Sr. Barbara Arceneaux, and Sr. Martha Ann Abshire.

The North American Province operates its facilities through the Provincial and Council, who have a responsibility to account for the management of its affairs to the General Superior of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in Paris.

In the early days, the Sisters were recruited by the headquarters office in France, first from Calais where the Motherhouse was located, and later from Paris after World War II when the Generalate moved there. From the first contingent who came to Louisiana in 1911, until the 1960s and 1970s when the North American Province opened its own Novitiate, all but one of the Sisters had come from Europe. In the late 1930s a Baton Rouge woman, Mary Elizabeth Gibbens, went to France to join the Order. She returned to Louisiana but re-entered in 1943, when the American Novitiate opened, and became the first American woman to serve as a Franciscan Sister in the North American Province.

In the late 1940s, the North American Province was given permission to develop its own Novitiate program. This meant recruiting young women to join the Order, training them through the novitiate, and accepting them into the Order. The Sisters entered into this process with full vigor. A large number of young women entered the novitiate here in Baton Rouge. During the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, over 50 took first vows and were assigned to positions in the three hospitals.

Unfortunately, the changing times in the U.S. led many of them to leave the Order at some point or another. A number of those who left had played important roles in the Order, but subsequently chose to move on to other things. Today, there are 11 American women who are active in the Order.

For the most part, the Irish Sisters who came to America to serve in Louisiana remained here. Today, there are 10 still active. Three Vietnamese Americans, Sr. Ann Catherine Nguyen, Sr. Kim Le Nguyen, and Sr. Uyen Vu are among the most recent additions to the Sisterhood, along with Sr. Rita Lanie, a native of Louisiana.

## FRANCISCAN MISSIONARIES OF OUR LADY HEALTH SYSTEM

The Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System (FMOLHS) is a non-profit corporation, organized under the laws of the State of Louisiana. It is owned by the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, North American Province, Baton Rouge, LA. The North American Province, in turn, is a constituent group of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, Paris, France, which conducts health and education programs in 16 countries around the world. The world-wide organization operates under a mandate of the Roman Catholic Church. Through its sponsored facilities, the FMOL Health System is committed to carrying out the healing ministry of Jesus Christ, while promoting the dignity and wholeness of the human person. With total assets of over a billion dollars, FMOLHS is committed to greater participation in the decision-making process of people, and the delivery of quality health care to the people they serve.

The FMOL Health System operates three major medical centers in the State of Louisiana. The oldest unit is St. Francis Medical Center in Monroe, which serves Northeast Louisiana. Opened in 1913 with a capacity of 75 beds, it has grown to become a major health care facility known for its exceptional service. Today, St. Francis has 400 beds, employs a staff of almost 1500 full-time employees and has approximately 300 physicians on its staff. A leader among health centers in Louisiana, St. Francis was first to develop an endobronchial radiation treatment program, it opened the first skilled care unit, home health, hospice, and specialty hospital in Louisiana, and it was the first to develop CPR training in Louisiana. In addition to its health care affiliates in Monroe, SFMC is part of the Northeast Louisiana Health Network, providing for more efficient and cost effective health services to the people of Louisiana.

Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center is the dominant institution in health care in the Greater Baton Rouge area. It is also the largest private medical center in Louisiana, with 852 licensed beds. Opened in 1923, the Lake has grown from its modest beginning to a major player in health care, not only in its geographical area, but to Central America and the Caribbean as well. In a given year, Our Lady of the Lake treats about 25,000 patients in the hospital, and services about 350,000 persons through outpatient locations. It has a complement of almost 900 physicians and 3,000 staff members. The Lake maintains an affiliation with Woman's Hospital in Baton Rouge to provide for the needs of women. The Lake also operates two nursing homes, has an affiliated cancer facility adjacent to the main hospital, and operates a number of outpatient services on its campus as well as in outlying locations. Additionally, on its campus, the Lake also operates a community college. Stemming originally from its nursing school, the College now offers training in a broad range of ancillary health disciplines and general studies on its campus.

Our Lady of Lourdes Regional Medical Center in Lafayette has provided quality health care to the people of Acadiana since 1949. Lourdes is one of the most respected health care centers in Southwest Louisiana with 293 licensed beds, almost 1,500 employees, and over 400 physicians on staff. Our Lady of Lourdes is expanding to meet

the growing needs of the area, including the opening of St. Francis Plaza, which houses physician offices and a modern Outpatient Rehab and Health Promotion Center, complete with an adjacent parking tower. In a given year Lourdes will treat around 11,000 persons in the hospital and 30,000 persons in the emergency room. In its 50-year history, Lourdes has made significant strides, both in service and quality. As an example, Lourdes is rated in the top 100 hospitals in the U.S., both in Cardiac Bypass Surgery and Interventional Cardiology. Only 34 hospitals can attest to this distinction in both areas of service.

## Beginning Years

Mother de Bethanie, accompanied by five other Franciscan Sisters, came to the U.S. in 1911 under the invitation of the Bishop of Alexandria. They were slated to open a sanitarium in Pineville. Negotiations broke down when the owners of the proposed property refused to budge on price. Father C. Mahe, a Catholic priest from the area, had accompanied the Sisters to Louisiana. Father Mahe then got in touch with Monsignor Ludovic Enaut, a retired Catholic priest in Monroe, who was interested in bringing Sisters to Monroe.

Monsignor Ludovic Enaut offered the Sisters an excellent site in downtown Monroe, plus \$75,000 with which to start building. The group of six Sisters, led by Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, a native of Ireland, moved to Monroe, opening St. Francis Sanitarium in 1913. The other Sisters were Sr. Angelique van Bockstale, Sr. Brigida Comerford, Sr. Margaret Gaffney, Sr. M. Hortulane Arnould, and Sr. St. Joseph Martin. St. Francis Sanitarium, as it was aptly named, had 75 beds, and served Northeast Louisiana, a largely non-Catholic area. However, the people welcomed the Sisters as their own, working closely with the Sisters to make it an excellent institution that serviced the health needs of the populace, regardless of religious affiliation.

Our Lady of the Lake in Baton Rouge was the second of the Franciscan institutions to be formed. The existing hospital in that community was too small to meet the needs of a growing community. Once again, under the guidance of Mother de Bethanie, working with Monsignor Gassler, the Pastor of St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Baton Rouge and a group of business and civic leaders, Our Lady of the Lake Sanitarium was opened in 1923, a 100 bed facility. Over half of the residents of Baton Rouge showed up for the dedication, marking one of the greatest outpourings of community interest and support in the history of Baton Rouge.

Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Lafayette, the third of the Franciscan hospitals to be built in Louisiana, opened its doors in 1949. It grew out of the need for a Catholic health facility in this heavily Catholic area of the State of Louisiana. Its development was spurred on by a car accident, involving the Bishop of the Lafayette Diocese, Jules Jeanmard and one of his diocesan priests, Monsignor Isenberg. They were hospitalized at Our Lady of the Lake, Monsignor Isenberg remaining in the hospital for several months. He and Mother Henrietta Didesse, the Mother Superior and head of Our Lady of the Lake

at that time, began discussions that led to the foundation of the third hospital in the Health System, Our Lady of Lourdes in Lafayette.

Even though the time and situations that led up to the development of the three Medical Centers, as they are called today, were different, the basic premises upon which they were formed were much the same. First, there was a distinct need among local people for adequate health care. Second, community leaders (religious, business, civic and professional) were strongly supportive of the effort. They were more than willing to pool their resources and take the leadership in getting things done. The third ingredient was the willingness and availability of the Franciscans, a group of religious women who inspired devotion to the cause of the sick as their reason for existence, and competence in putting together institutions that met community health needs.

These three medical centers were organized and operated over the years by a gallant group of over 140 Franciscan Sisters who chose to devote themselves to God in the service to the sick and the needy. In the early years, they did it all. They administered the hospitals and they nursed the sick in partnership with local physicians, and worked in a joint effort with community leadership to make these institutions very successful in meeting the health needs of the people they served. As time went on, especially since World War II, the needs and institutions grew significantly, while the number of Sisters in service diminished. As a consequence, local leaders assisted by competent local people have taken over much of the leadership and operation of these institutions. The Sisters are still in control at the corporate level, thus insuring that the purpose and mission of the institutions is under their supervision. They work in concert with the Board of Directors of the medical centers and the FMOL Health System, the overall corporate structure, to ensure that the institutions continue to flourish and that Franciscan values are maintained.

## St. Francis

At the invitation of Fr. Ludovic Enaut, Mother de Bethanie and her staff left Pineville and traveled to Monroe. From his personal resources, Father Enaut offered the Sisters a choice plot of land in downtown Monroe plus \$75,000 to construct a sanitarium. The Sisters began their ministry in a rented home, planning for and supervising construction, and making home visits to the sick. St. Francis opened its doors a few days earlier than expected on July 14, 1913, and accepted its first patient, a girl who needed an emergency appendectomy.

Thus began the saga of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in Louisiana. St. Francis Sanitarium was a fortuitous achievement, although not the one originally planned for the Sisters.

One of the noteworthy achievements of the Sisters was the opening of an African-American ward. It was designed to serve the African American population of the area, and it was headed by a remarkable Irish Franciscan, Sr. Mary Reginald Slattery.

Together with John Allen, an orderly, they turned back a Ku Klux Klan attempt at lynching one of her patients who was accused of a crime against a white person. The building was torn down in the 1960s when integration became law. Today, there is a building called Reginald Hall, named for Sr. Reginald Slattery, on the grounds of St. Francis. It is used as an administrative facility.

Commenting on the early days at St. Francis, Sr. Anne Marie Twohig, retired President/CEO of St. Francis, said: "From the original six pioneering Sisters, whose faith was unwavering, we give thanks....while their financial resources were limited, they were filled with Christian commitment and blessed with great vision. With God's guidance they brought forth a first for Monroe – a community hospital. The physical facility has changed and expanded,...medical technology has mushroomed, and the number of patients served has vastly increased, yet one facet of our service remains the same – our Christian commitment. The Sisters are still dedicated to principles that time does not change: kindness, caring, love, stewardship, and devotion to duty."

Sr. Jerome Crowley, a cousin of Mother de Bethanie, said "...Mother de Bethanie would be proud of the St. Francis Medical Center of today. While the technology has vastly changed, our values and high principles have remained constant. God used us to help others when modern medicine leaves questions rather than answers. The Sisters' presence throughout the hospital lets others know that here, in this place, there is a serious concern for spiritual needs. We must continue to grow to help serve the sick. Our goal is to help others enjoy the wellness of life. When the sick get better and we know that we have served them well, then we can sit back and smell the magnolias and talk about old times together. Our commitment is to serve in love."

The Sisters of today are gifted with the same intangible qualities which constituted the visionary spirit of the early Sisters. They still seek new frontiers and are constantly looking forward, anticipating, assessing, projecting and planning. Their motivation is defined in their mission statement: "The Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady...are committed to respecting the life of each human being from the moment of conception to the moment of death. Love of God, love of neighbor, and the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi shall guide and direct our work."

### Our Lady of the Lake

Yearnings for a larger and more modern hospital in Baton Rouge began around 1920. The only facility in Baton Rouge at that time was St. Mary's Sanitarium owned and operated by Dr. and Mrs. W.B. Chamberlain. It was deemed insufficient by leaders in the Baton Rouge community, by Dr. Chamberlain, and by Father F.L. Gassler of St. Joseph's Church. Attempts had been made to entice several religious communities to come to Baton Rouge, but they were unsuccessful.

In 1921, requests were made to the Franciscan Sisters in Monroe. Mother de Bethanie, the religious superior at St. Francis Sanitarium in Monroe, agreed and came to Baton Rouge to assess the situation. She was favorably impressed with the possibilities.

St. Mary's Infirmary was offered as the possible site, but Mother de Bethanie thought it was too small and not well located. Renovating and expanding the facility wouldn't work very well. She made a counter proposal to build a new facility, locating it on the North side of University Lake (later Capitol Lake) on a 17 acre tract, formerly a sugar house site and at the time a mule yard. This shocked some people, but her plans met with general approval in the Baton Rouge community.

The success of the Franciscan facility in Monroe, undoubtedly, gave her leverage in negotiating with the leaders in Baton Rouge. A committee was organized. Its composition featured a broad-based community representation, five Catholics, five Jews, and five Protestants. Within a few days \$30,000 was raised, and the plan was put into motion.

Two years later on November 4, 1923, Our Lady of the Lake Sanitarium was opened. The dedication of the facility was one of the most significant events in the history of the City. Reportedly, more than 10,000 people (estimated to be half the population) attended the event, arriving by every possible kind of conveyance or on foot. It was described in the Baton Rouge State Times as "standing castle-like on a hill with green terraced lawns sloping down to a tree-bordered lake."

Former Chairman of Our Lady of the Lake Board of Directors, Sidney Arbour, who was only nine years old at the time, remembers the day well. He commented, "We went for three reasons: to see the finest new building in town; to meet the new Franciscan nuns; and to see the new steel furniture that had been ordered through Kornmeyers Furniture Store, which was owned by my grandmother..."

A nursing school was opened in 1925, graduating the first nurse in 1926. The Franciscans felt a strong need for trained nurses since there were not enough Sisters to fully staff the growing facility. The solution, in typical Franciscan fashion was to do something about it.

As the needs of the Baton Rouge community grew, the Franciscan Sisters continued to improve the hospital's facilities. The original structure consisted of four stories with 100 beds. A separate wooden structure was built in the mid-1920s to handle the needs of the nursing school. In the late 1930s, a convent was built for the Sisters since their former quarters in the hospital were needed to accommodate the demand for additional facilities. In 1941, an annex was added, raising the bed capacity to 200. During the war years, an addition was made to the School of Nursing in order to handle an influx of trainees for the U.S. Army nurse program.

In 1929, Mother de Bethanie returned to Ireland to take on another assignment for the Franciscan Order. Sister Henrietta Didesse, a French Sister, succeeded her. She served as administrator for 31 years, stepping down in 1960.

September 8, 1935, was a memorable day in the history of the Lake. Senator Huey Long was shot in the State Capitol Building, right across from Our Lady of the

Lake Hospital. This event brought Our Lady of the Lake Hospital into national prominence, and into the center of a controversy. Senator Long underwent surgery at Our Lady of the Lake to repair damage to his stomach and intestines. He died on September 10.

### Our Lady of Lourdes

Lourdes, as the Medical Center is generally called today, was the last of the three Franciscan institutions to be established. Lourdes came along much later than St. Francis and Our Lady of the Lake, but the pattern was much the same. There was a felt need locally, but in this instance it came primarily from the Catholic community. Being in the heartland of Acadiana in Louisiana, there was a strong desire to form a Catholic health care institution, although there was already a large hospital in Lafayette. The community in a sense, felt left out because there was not a Catholic hospital staffed by nursing Sisters.

It took a car accident involving Bishop Jules Jeanmard and Monsignor Isenberg to put a spark into the community process. While in Our Lady of the Lake Hospital as a patient, Monsignor Isenberg began discussions with Mother Henrietta, the Superior. This led to meetings and discussions with leaders in the Lafayette community to get things underway. The response was most enthusiastic. Under the leadership of Msgr. Isenberg and Mrs. Corinne Gauthier, the local community quickly raised \$550,000, a rather incredible sum in 1949. As a consequence, the dream of the Monsignor began to come true.

Our Lady of Lourdes began as a relatively small undertaking, however. Opening in 1949, the original structure contained 45 beds in a two-story facility.

Seven years later in 1956 four stories were added, raising the capacity to 110 and, by 1965, fifteen years after opening, the facility had 160 beds.

What started out as a modest development, grew very quickly. The response among the people of Acadiana was strong, indicating a fervent desire among the Catholic community for a Sister-led facility. As an indication of the strong feeling, from the beginning roughly half of the patients at Lourdes were from the surrounding parishes. Lourdes quickly moved into the status of a regional medical center.

### The Growth Years

Health care literally has exploded since the end of World War II. The changes have been pervasive, moving from the concept of the family doctor, complete with his black bag, calling at the homes of his patients or meeting patients in his office. Very frequently, he prescribed and dispensed medications, either from his bag or from his office. Invariably, the doctor was a man and the nurse was a woman, although that changed with the advent of increased awareness of opportunities for women in later

years.

The end of World War II brought about many profound changes in the American way of life. Medical care has been in the forefront of these changes. Today, major hospitals are now called medical centers, and either on campus or nearby are located the clinics and the assorted specialty practices where the vast majority of patients go for treatment. Instead of a general practitioner, the typical patient will visit an assortment of family practice and/or specialist physicians, depending on the nature of the problem and/or the insurance provider guidelines for seeking medical care. In the outlying smaller communities, local clinics tend to send the more serious and complex cases to regional medical centers, thus promoting the growth of these institutions.

A number of factors have contributed to these changes, and the result is that a medical center, and its subsidiary and/or associated medical practices and service units, is a focal point around which the health care industry is now built. The changes evolved quickly. The three Medical Centers in the FMOL Health System went through a whole series of planned expansions, fund drives, restructuring and additions to facilities in order to cope with the growing demands of medical practice and patient care. The following describes some of the noteworthy events in the history of the three medical centers:

#### St. Francis

- 1- Patient beds increased from 120 in the 1940s to 450 at the present time.
- 2- Today the facility is a large complex built around a seven-story main building.
- 3- This growth was achieved through a series of four major construction and renovation projects in the middle fifties, middle sixties, middle seventies, and middle nineties. Additionally, other changes and additions were made in intervening years, especially parking facilities.
- 4- In 1953, St. Francis was formally chartered as a corporation in Louisiana, and the first Board of Directors was formed, consisting of seven Sisters. Mother Henrietta Didesse, Regional Superior, and President of Our Lady of the Lake Hospital, was named Board Chairperson.
- 5- In 1977, St. Francis was renamed as a medical center, serving Northeast Louisiana. In assuming this expanded role, St. Francis played a major part in the formation of the Northeast Louisiana Heart Network and later Northeast Louisiana Cancer Institute.
- 6- In 1979, the first lay persons were added to the Board of Directors. The Board consisted of six Sisters and four lay persons. Sr. Agnes Marie Fitzsimons, President of Our Lady of Lourdes, served as Board Chairperson
- 7- In 1980, Nelson D. Abell was named Vice Chair of the Board of Directors. In 1983 he became Board Chair, the first lay person to serve in either of those capacities at St.

Francis.

8- The practice of lay Chairpersons has continued; lay persons also continued as a majority of the Board.

9- In 1993, H. Gerald Smith was named as President and CEO of St. Francis, the first lay person to head the medical center.

10- The Franciscan House was established for HIV and AIDS patients.

11- The S.D. Hill Clinic was built and opened during the 1990s in honor of St. Francis' first African American physician.

### Our Lady of the Lake

1- In the 1950s the number of patient beds was increased to 400 at the Capitol Lake site; a seven story wing to the main building was constructed.

2- At the original Lake site, from 1923-78, the following statistics were recorded:

Admissions - 904,603

Births - 121,408

Nursing School graduates -over 1,100

3- In the 1960s the first laymen were appointed to serve on Our Lady of the Lake Board of Directors; a prominent Baton Rouge business man, William Doran, was the first lay Board Chairman.

4- In 1967, J.B. Heroman was named Administrator, the first lay person to serve in that post.

5- Sr. Margaret Ann Miller, Asst. Admminstrator, working with Mr. Heroman, took the leadership in planning the new hospital facility. She died of cancer in 1973 before the new facility was completed.

6- In 1978 Our Lady of the Lake moved to the new site on Essen Lane, near the intersection of Interstate Highways I-10 and I-12; the facility was located on a 100-acre site; cost - \$140 million; bed capacity - 563.

7- The State of Louisiana purchased the old site on Capitol Lake. By 1982, the old facility was demolished. Today, a major governmental facility is located on the property.

8- In 1979, Robert C. Davidge was named President/CEO of Our Lady of the Lake.

9- St. Mary's Tower was opened in 1985, increasing overall capacity to 763 beds, and making the Lake the largest private medical center in Louisiana.

## Our Lady of Lourdes

1. In its first year of operation after opening in 1949, Lourdes served 1324 patients and delivered 369 babies.
2. The original Lourdes campus, a 15-acre tract located in downtown Lafayette, has grown significantly since that time.
3. The main hospital building now is a seven-story structure; a heliport is located on the roof, and a large parking facility is connected to the building.
- 4- Lourdes now has a capacity of 430 patients; it is now a major referral center for surrounding areas in Southwest Louisiana.
- 5- In 1980, Dudley Romero was named President and CEO, marking the first time that a lay person has headed Lourdes. Mr. Romero served with distinction for 20 years, retiring in the year 2000, when Ron Webb became President/CEO of Lourdes.
- 6- As a regional medical center, Our Lady of Lourdes has been the market leader in Acadiana for cardiology, oncology/cancer care, and general medical services.
- 7- Patients from the entire area are treated with an extensive complement of surgical and diagnostic capabilities, rehabilitation programs, and outpatient services.

Robert Eddy, Jr., Chairman of the Lourdes Board of Directors in the year 2000, summed up the rapid progress at Lourdes: "I can't point to a singular event or moment that stands as our greatest achievement...What stands out for me is the way our staff lives its mission day by day, integrating the healing ministry into health care... Our partnership with the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady and the Diocese of Lafayette embraces a philosophy that promotes a spirit of healing, wellness, protection of life and recognition of human dignity."

Sr. Betty Lyons, Administrator of Mission and Community Services at Lourdes, added this comment: "We take pride in the unique relationship this partnership has allowed us to form with the Acadiana community as we follow our mission in a proactive manner... As a matter of policy, Lourdes welcomes all persons who need health care, regardless of religious beliefs."

## Development of the Corporate Structure

In the 1950s laws were being passed to require non-profit organizations to formalize their organizational structure legally and to meet certain requirements. The initial corporate structures formed by the Sisters were centered around the three facilities, and Board membership consisted entirely of Franciscan Sisters. Each hospital was an independent corporation, owned solely by the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady,

North American Province. The Sisters were used to a hierarchical structure within the Order, so they continued to operate the hospitals in the usual manner.

As time went on, the Sisters felt the growing need for formal community input into the hospitals. As a consequence, beginning in the late 1960s in Baton Rouge area, followed by Monroe and Lafayette in the 1970s, influential local people were invited to serve on the Board of Directors, a minority at first, but slowly but surely they became the majority of the Board. In the 70s and 80s, Board leadership was handed over to the local community.

The evolution of medical care during that era brought about another major change. With the advance of technology, coupled with large scale insurance coverage such as managed care, contracts for health coverage for large groups, etc., it became increasingly important for the Franciscans to bring about greater cooperation and coordination of its Medical Centers. In 1984, a parent corporation was formed to legally unite the three Medical Centers. Hence the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System became a legal reality.

A Health System Board was organized, consisting of a combination of Franciscan Sisters, health professionals of national esteem, and influential citizens from the areas served by the FMOL Health System. Sr. Pauline O'Sullivan and Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne each served terms as President of the FMOL Health System. In 1996, a transition was made, bringing in John Finan, a native of New Orleans and a highly competent and experienced health system executive, to serve as President of the FMOL Health System.

The Health System Board has been led by some very knowledgeable professionals; first by Charles Thoele of St. Louis, a corporate health system COO, then by Paul W. Murrill of Baton Rouge, a university and corporate CEO, followed by Roland Touns, a corporate CEO in the Baton Rouge area. The organization of the Health System, working in concert with the Board of Directors, has made it possible for the three Medical Centers to work collectively and effectively in the pursuit of the Mission of the FMOL Health System.

### The Haiti Project

Haiti has been characterized not only as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, but also one of the poorest in the world. Ninety percent of its population live in abject poverty, mostly in the rural areas but also in downtrodden slums. Population pressure on the land is a major cause of this poverty. Haiti has more people than it can feed, and the result is barren mountainsides from population pressure on the land, while the fertile lands in the valleys are heavily overburdened. The typical Haitian family lives in extremely poor circumstances in the rural areas where a large proportion of the population lives; the environment is extremely harsh. The nearest water supply is usually a nearby stream, and water must be brought home by the jug-full. Typically the stream is badly polluted since it serves as the family water supply, and a place to bathe, use the

bathroom, and wash clothes. It also serves as irrigation for subsistence crops. Needless to say, health conditions are appalling.

In 1988, the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady, North American Province, decided to establish a mission in Haiti. Two talented and committed Sisters, Sr. Althea Jonis and Sr. Martha Ann Abshire, were missioned to Haiti to establish a health clinic in a rural area. They selected a little rural community called Ste. Helene where there was a small Catholic mission church where the needs were quite apparent. Ste. Helene is located up the mountainside about five miles inland from the town of Aquin which is located on the Southwest coast of Haiti.

Sisters Althea and Martha Ann were soon joined by a French Sister, Sister Marie Clarie Revelard. As the mission continued to grow, in 1994 another Franciscan Sister from Louisiana, Sister June Ann Meyer, joined Sister Althea and Sister Marie Claire since Sister Martha Ann had been called to serve on the General Council in Paris, France.

Thirteen years of hard work have paid off. Today Ste. Helene has a health clinic operated by the Franciscan Sisters, an elementary school for local children, and a newly opened hospice for seriously malnourished children, all run by the Sisters who are ably assisted by Haitians they have trained. To alleviate the problem of good water, the Franciscans dug a deep water well which produces potable water. Haitians come from miles around to use the clinic and get clean water, both tremendous assets in improving the health of the community. On the average, two thousand patients per month visit the clinic.

Sisters Althea and Marie Claire are continuing to minister to the needs of the Haitian people. Two Haitian women are now in the novitiate in France, studying to become Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady. They are the possible future of the mission in Haiti.

## Epilogue

The Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System has grown from a small hands-on operation run solely by the Sisters to a major Health System operating three large medical centers in the State of Louisiana. This change occurred in 89 years of dedicated work by a group of Franciscan Sisters who came and dedicated their lives to helping the sick in Louisiana. What is most remarkable is that they were able to move from a small operation in which they gave direct care to a major health system where they are in fact the corporate owners of a large, complex medical corporation with assets of \$1.2 billion.

There are at least two secrets to their success. First, they had a God-given Mission to which they gave fully of themselves, serving all who came, regardless of religious affiliation, race, and/or ability to pay. Second, they worked hand in hand with the leaders

of the community to build and operate quality health care institutions. Finally, they were seen as the angels of God who came to help people in suffering and misery.

## Appendix

### THE CONGREGATION

Those Franciscan Sisters who had responsibility for and/or participated in the development of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady are listed below.

Superior Generals of the Congregation who had administrative and supervisory control over the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady:

Mother Louise Mabile (Founding Mother Superior), 1854-64  
Mother Marie Anna Verrier, 1904-15  
Mother Anastasia, 1915-19  
Mother Osmanne, 1919-45  
Mother Marguerite of the Cross, 1946-58  
Mother Agatha Morris, 1958-76  
Mother Marie Alice Portela, 1976-88  
Sister Margarida Maria Vasques, 1988-94  
Sister Brigitte des Haulles, 1994-

Founding Sisters who came in 1911 to begin the work in Louisiana:

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley  
Sister Angelique van Bockstale  
Sister Brigida Comerford  
Sister Marie Hortulane Arnould  
Sister Margaret Gaffney  
Sister Saint Joseph Martin

Sisters who served as Superiors of the Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady in Louisiana:

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, 1911-29  
Mother Henrietta Didesse, 1929-60  
Mother Marie Gertrude Hennessey, 1960-78  
Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1978-86 – (First elected Provincial)  
Sister Pauline O’Sullivan, 1986-94  
Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1994-2002

Sisters from the North American Province who have served on the General Council in Paris:

Sister Jerome Crowley  
Sister Barbara Arceneaux  
Sister Martha Ann Abshire

Sisters who served as local Community Leaders:

St. Francis

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, 1911-23  
Mother Mary of Nazereth McGinn, 1923-34  
Mother Marie Brendan Donegan, 1934-49  
Mother Marie Gertrude Hennessy, 1949-1960  
Sister Anne Marie Twohig – 1960-1968  
Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne  
Sister Pauline O’Sullivan  
Sister Jerome Crowley  
Sister Eileen Corcoran  
Sister Helen Cahill

Our Lady of the Lake

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, 1923-29  
Mother Henrietta Didesse, 1929-60  
Mother Marie Gertrude Hennessy, 1960-78  
Sister Margaret Ann Miller  
Sister Lilian Lynch  
Sister Edana Corcoran

Provincial House

Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1978-86  
Sister Pauline O’Sullivan, 1986-94  
Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1994-2002

Our Lady of Lourdes

Mother Marie Brendan Donegan, 1949-1960  
Sister Angel Verne  
Sister Ann Young  
Sister Agnes Marie Fitzsimons  
Sister Susan Moncla  
Sister Mary Benedict Arceneaux – 1976-1982  
Sister Laura Garin

The persons who have served as Administrators of Franciscan Institutions in the North American Province are as follows:

Franciscan Missionaries of Our Lady Health System

Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1984-1986  
Sister Pauline O’Sullivan, 1986-94  
Sister Brendan Mary Ronayne, 1994-96  
John Finan, 1996-

St. Francis Medical Center

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, 1913-1923  
Mother Mary of Nazareth McGinn, 1923-1934  
Mother Marie Brendan Donegan, 1934-49  
Mother Marie Gertrude Hennessey, 1949-60  
Sister Ann Marie Twohig, 1960-68  
Sister Magdalen O'Donovan, 1968-78  
Sister Ann Marie Twohig, 1979-93  
H. Gerald Smith, 1993-

Our Lady of Lake Regional Medical Center

Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley, 1923-29  
Mother Henrietta Didesse, 1929-60  
Mother Marie Gertrude Hennessey, 1960-67  
J.B. Heroman, 1967-1979  
Robert C. Davidge, 1979-

Our Lady of Lourdes

Mother Marie Brendan Donegan, 1949-54  
Sister Angel Verne, 1954-60  
Mother Henrietta Didesse, 1960-66  
Sister Agnes Marie Fitzsimons, 1966-82  
Don Hebert ?  
Dudley Romero, 1982-2000  
Ron Webb, 2000-

The Haiti Project

Founding Sisters

Sister Althea Jonis, 1988-  
Sister Martha Ann Abshire, 1988-1994

Sisters who have served in Haiti

Sister June Meyer-1994-96  
Sister Marie Claire Revelard, 1988-91, 1996-

Sisters who have served in the North American Province:

Sr. Agnes Marie Fitzsimons  
Sr. Alice Marie Hensel  
Sr. Althea Jonis (Sr. Mary Andrew)  
Sr. Angel Verne  
Sr. Angelique van Bockstale  
Sr. Angela Joseph Mangham  
Sr. Anita Dupre  
Sr. Ann Catherine Nguyen  
Sr. Ann Gabrielle

Sr. Anne Marie Twohig (Sr. Marie Finbarr)  
Sr. Ann Young (Sr. Francis and Sr. Auberge)  
Sr. Anne Eugenie  
Sr. Arlene Casey  
Sr. Anthony Martinez  
Sr. Augustine  
Sr. Barbara Arceneaux (Sr. Mary Benedict Arceneaux)  
Sr. Bernadette Sanchez  
Mother Marie de Bethanie Crowley  
Sr. Betty Lyons (Sr. Mary John)  
Sr. Brigida Comerford  
Sr. Brendan Mary Ronayne  
Sr. Catherine Frances Martin  
Sr. St. Catherine  
Sr. St. Colman Coughlin  
Sr. Cindy Louviere  
Sr. Damian  
Sr. Deborah Guidry  
Sr. Dianne Larcade (Sr. Mary Helen)  
Sr. Dominic Savio  
Sr. Donna Nicolisi (Sr. Michael Paul)  
Sr. Dorothy Siegrist  
Sr. Dympna O'Connor  
Sr. Earleen Desselle (Sr. Mary Peter)  
Sr. M. Edana Collins  
Sr. M. Edana Corcoran  
Sr. M. Edana Delaney  
Sr. Edith Marie Donegan  
Sr. Eileen Colleton  
Sr. Eileen Corcoran (Sr. Brigida)  
Sr. Eileen Rowe (Sr. John Bosco)  
Sr. Finbar Murray  
Sr. Florence Winkley  
Mother Marie Gertrude Hennessy  
Sr. Helen Langley (Sr. Mary Alexis)  
Sr. Helen Cahill (Sr. Mary Ita)  
Mother Henrietta Didesse  
M. Hortulane Arnould  
Sr. M. Hubertina  
Sr. Marie Imelda Gaffney (Sr. Marie Imelda)  
Sr. Jean Marie Renaux  
Sr. Mary Jerome Crowley  
Sr. Joseph Martin  
Sr. Joyce Gayles (Sr. Marie Therese)  
Sr. Julie O'Donovan (Sr. Philomena)  
Sr. Juliette de Castro Barros

Sr. June Ann Meyer  
Sr. Kathleen Cain (Sr. Edward)  
Sr. Kathleen Cuneo  
Sr. Kathleen McDonough (Sr. Catherine Frances)  
Sr. Kim Le Nguyen  
Sr. Laura Garin (Sr. Mary Eugene)  
Sr. Lee Palumbo (Sr. John Anthony)  
Sr. Liboire  
Sr. Ligouri Lawton  
Sr. Lilian Lynch (Sr. Lilian Bernard)  
Sr. Linda Constantin (Sr. Mary Martin)  
Sr. Linda Guidry (Sr. John Francis)  
Sr. Louise  
Sr. M. Madeleine Lemoine  
Sr. M. Magdalen O'Donovan  
Sr. Magdelaine  
Sr. Margaret Mary Leboffe  
Sr. Margarida Maria Vasques  
Sr. Marie Brendan Donegan  
Sr. Marie Brigitte  
Sr. Marie Claire Revelard  
Sr. Martha Ann Abshire (Sr. Peter Damian)  
Sr. Martha de Bethanie O'Callaghan  
Sr. Mary Aloysia Duho  
Sr. Mary Andrew McCoy  
Sr. Mary Ann Sepulvado (Sr. Ann William)  
Sr. Mary Cabrini (Lillie Dry)  
Sr. Mary Claire Jungmaun  
Sr. Mary Elizabeth Benefield  
Sr. Mary Elizabeth Gibbens  
Sr. Mary Enda Walsh  
Sr. Mary Katherine  
Sr. Mary Lawrence McCarthy  
Sr. Mary McGinn (Sr. Mary of Nazareth)  
Sr. Mary Michael Twohig  
Sr. Mary Patricia Hennessy  
Sr. Mary Pius O'Connell  
Sr. Mary Reginald Martinez  
Sr. Mary Reginald Slattery  
Sr. Mary Theresa  
Sr. Mary Theresa Crowley (Sr. Kevin)  
Sr. Mary Timothy Lyons  
Sr. Maureen Riley  
Sr. St. Michael O'Shea  
Sr. Monica Glawson  
Sr. Myra Rogers

Sr. Nellie of the Blessed Sacrament  
Sr. Pacific  
Sr. Pam Mhire  
Sr. Pam Neurer  
Sr. St.Patrick Comerford  
Sr. St. Paul  
Sr. Pauline O'Sullivan  
Sr. Penny Proffit (Sr. Mary Brigid)  
Sr. Perpetua Mary Ballard  
Sr. Peter Claver (Linda LeBlanc)  
Sr. Rita Boyle  
Sr. Rita Lanie  
Sr. Rose Marie Fitzgerald (Sr. Bathilde)  
Sr. Rosemarie Faris (Sr. Anthony Jude)  
Sr. Sandy Conley  
Sr. Sarah Gillespie (Sr. Mary Ann)  
Sr. Susan Johnston (Sr. Mary Celestine)  
Sr. Susan Moncla (Sr. Elise Francis)  
Sr. Therese Praught  
Sr. Theresita Crowley  
Sr. Thomas O'Callaghan  
Sr. Uyen Vu  
Sr. Vernola Lyons (Sr. Mary Monica)  
Sr. Veronica Dorgan  
Sr. Vincent