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# COURIER-JOURNAL

## Southern Tier-Auburn Geneva

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### Hospitals Take Major Step toward Merger

By **MARTIN TOOMBS**  
 Southern Tier Editor

**Hornell**—An intensive two-day bargaining session in September has brought the five-year-old merger discussions between St. James Mercy and Bethesda hospitals closer to fruition.

The new corporation, tentatively named the Bethesda Mercy Health Center, would operate both facilities.

Following the bargaining session and approval by the hospital boards, the board presidents signed a letter of intent Oct. 26 establishing the basis for the merger.

While ensuring quality medical care to the Hornell area at a reasonable cost has been the reason for the merger discussions, maintaining a Catholic identity in a merged health facility has been an additional concern of St. James' board.

Sister Mary Rene McNiff, RSM, St. James administrator, noted that

they could find no precedent for a merger that retained a Catholic identity, so the hospitals are pioneering a concept.

The hospitals' boards have voted several times, at various stages of the discussion, in favor of continued movement toward merger.

Similar situations in other cities have resulted in the closing of the Catholic hospital. The Hornell situation is different, Sister Rene noted, because St. James is the larger and more financially stable of the two facilities, and because of the Sisters of Mercy's interest in continued involvement in health care in Hornell.

Sister Rene explained that the St. James board decided that they didn't "want to lose the religious dimension" or "the administration" of St. James, and sought to ensure those items in the negotiations.

The make-up of the new corporation's board of directors was the key to the

discussion in September. St. James, the larger facility, had asked for two-thirds of the board; Bethesda wanted an equal split, sister recounted.

The letter of intent calls for the board to include eight members from St. James, and eight from Bethesda. Five of the St. James members will be designees of the Sisters of Mercy. Additionally, the new corporation's administrator will be Sister Rene, and the new board's first president must be from the Bethesda nominees.

The congregation also retains the right to veto changes in the hospital's "statements concerning moral or spiritual considerations or which are inconsistent with the religious views of the major faiths" or any change "in the number or ratio of the Sisters of Mercy or designees on the Board." The letter of intent does not extend the veto power to other issues.

The statement also calls

for the constitution and bylaws to "contain appropriate statements concerning the mission, philosophy and sponsorship of Bethesda Mercy Health Center. These statements will include, but not be limited to, commitments that provide for the continued presence of the Sisters of Mercy. It must be made clear that the pastoral and spiritual side of hospital care shall be recognized for persons of all faiths. These provisions shall follow the religious precepts of reverence of life, love, justice, compassion and service to others."

Included in the understanding, Sister Rene said, is that abortions will not be performed in the merged hospital. Parties to the issue have agreed, she noted, including doctors, that they will stop doing abortions locally.

Currently, she noted, work is being done on a legal contract that will accomplish the merger. Issues that must be considered include em-

ployee pay and benefits, assumption of debts and assets, the hospital auxiliaries, medical staff and contracts.

The merger also must be reviewed by the Finger Lakes Health Systems Agency and approved by the state.

The announcement and later publication of the letter of intent has caused a controversy in Hornell.

The city's doctors, most of whom are on the staff of both hospitals, have voted 20 to two in favor of the merger, with two abstentions, Sister Rene reported.

Further support has come from local Protestant and Catholic clergy, in a statement signed by 17 members of the Hornell Ministerial Association.

The letter of intent addresses the issue of job security, which has been questioned, stating that "there will be no layoffs of present employees due to consolidation. Bethesda Mercy Health Center will

preserve seniority and vested rights for all the employees."

Sister Rene pointed out that the combined facility might be able to begin new services. Such expansion would mean additional jobs to the community, she noted.

Currently the hospitals are looking for someone to coordinate the transition.

Once a contract is signed, Sister Rene said, the new corporation will come into being. During the following two years, she said, the new corporation's board will consider the possibilities for use of the two buildings. The goal, she said, is to "get down, as far as possible, to one of each" department, eliminating duplication.

She commented that she felt such planning will be simpler when it is being done by one board concerned with the most efficient use of two buildings, rather than two boards trying to negotiate trade-offs.

### Mario Biaggi:

## Irish Peace Needs Help From the U.S.

By **MARY ANN GINNERTY**

**Auburn**—The United States must play a more constructive role if there is to be peace in Ireland, said Rep. Mario Biaggi (D-NY) at the John F. Kennedy division of the Ancient Order of Hibernians' annual Communion supper Nov. 25.

Biaggi, chairman of the 123-member ad hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs, recently returned from a trip to Ireland where he met with Belfast, Dublin and Armagh representatives of political and paramilitary organizations.

Biaggi said, "I am convinced that essential to any solution in Ireland is the restoration of human and civil rights, which have been so ruthlessly denied to the people of Northern Ireland, especially in the prisons."

"In the past months, I have worked to gain a more positive response by the administration of Jimmy Carter to the overall Irish

question. On the Monday before I left for Ireland, I met with UN Ambassador Andrew Young to advise him of my trip and my expectations."

He pointed out that the growing sentiment in Ireland is that the British Government must withdraw.

"It is obvious that no peace can come to Ireland while the status quo of the British presence remains," he added.

Biaggi said one example of U.S. involvement would be a peace forum where all parties, paramilitary organizations and representatives of the British and Irish governments can meet publicly for the first time to present and listen to peace proposals.

Biaggi will present a report on his study mission to the ad hoc committee.

"I have never seen that beautiful land without the scars of violence and bloodshed. I want to see Ireland again as a land where peace and justice prevails," he said.

### Hospital Receives Award

**Elmira**—Sister Martha Gersbach, St. Joseph's Hospital administrator, has announced that the institution has been awarded an energy conservation merit certificate by the American Hospital Association for achieving a substantial reduction in energy consumption.

The certificate was accompanied by letters of congratulation from the American Hospital Association and the Society for Hospital Engineering.

Sister Martha said that "we are pleased that through the efforts of our Department of Buildings and Grounds, the 12 percent reduction in gas and electrical energy usage was achieved. St. Joseph's is deeply involved in cost containment programs throughout the hospital and it is inspiring to be able to point to tangible savings in one of the more critical areas of conservation."

The reduction was attributed to replacement of various heating controls, lowering of temperatures in non-patient areas, and elimination of most incandescent lighting.

Gordon Black, manager of New York State Electric and Gas, congratulated Sister Martha and William Lafferty, director of Buildings and Grounds, on the hospital's achievement.



### Priests Meet

Father Robert O'Neill (left) of the diocesan Tribunal met with priests of the Marriage Seneca-Cayuga Region recently at St. Alphonsus Church in Auburn. Father O'Neill reviewed marriage preparation guidelines and gave an updated report to the priests on the annulment process.

### Deceased Knights Honored

**Hornell**—The Hornell Council Knights of Columbus honored seven men who died during the year at services Sunday, Nov. 26 in St. Ann's Church.

Grand Knight John Arnault presided at the ceremonies following Mass. Participants included an honor guard from the Fourth Degree and Alfred L. Chapman, Past Grand Knight.

Following a reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians, Arnault said that the first principle of the knights is charity.

"Let us in charity pray for our brother knights for eternal life and happiness. Let us also pray for ourselves that through the virtue of charity we might be living witnesses to Christ," he said.

The deceased are Roger

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 Darnell O'Brien  
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 Dial 936-9121  
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Kay, Robert Carroll, William Nestor, William Tobin, Grover Prior, Samuel Constantino, and Nicholas Argenterii.

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