



Reuters/CNS
Nicole Nguyen holds a picture of convicted murderer Stanley Faulder during a protest of his execution in Huntsville, Texas.

Group condemns death penalty

WASHINGTON (CNS) — Drawing on beliefs of both faiths, the National Jewish/Catholic Consultation is calling for an end to the death penalty.

From a second-century Jewish teaching that the death penalty is destructive, through last January's statement by Pope John Paul II calling it "cruel and unnecessary," the consultation found shared beliefs in the sanctity of human life and the role of capital punishment.

"Both traditions begin with an affirmation of the sanctity of human life," said the consultation's Dec. 6 statement released by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops.

"Both (traditions) ... acknowledge the theoretical possibility of a justifiable death penalty, since the Scriptures mandate it for

certain offenses. Yet both have, over the centuries, narrowed those grounds until, today, we would say together that it is time to cease the practice altogether."

The joint statement was welcomed by Deacon Brian McNulty, long active in community interfaith relations. He headed the Diocese of Rochester's former Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs from 1994 till this year.

"I think it's a fair and well thought-out document," he said. He added that Catholics, in particular, should heed the document's anti-death-penalty stance, especially since Christ was a victim of a state execution.

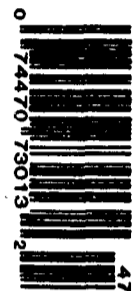
"Good Friday is a feast of capital punishment, and we mourn capital punishment, and yet we still practice it," he said.

The National Jewish/Catholic Consultation, representing the National Council of Synagogues and the Committee on Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs of the NCCB, has met twice yearly since 1987. The result has been joint statements on moral education in public schools, on pornography, on Holocaust revisionism and on the millennium.

In the current statement, "To End the Death Penalty," the group notes that upon considering each faith's traditions and teachings on capital punishment the members reached "a remarkable confluence of witness on how best in our time to interpret the eternal word of God."

The members analyzed both groups' declarations on capital punishment since the

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End of a 142-year ministry

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

In early 1997, Unity Health System took effect amid hope that the alliance of St. Mary's and Park Ridge hospitals in Rochester would ease financial burdens — particularly for St. Mary's.

"If we were not doing this affiliation, St. Mary's future was in serious jeopardy," Stewart Putnam, Unity's executive vice-president and chief operating officer, was quoted as saying in a *Catholic Courier* article later that year.

Yet should St. Mary's Hospital survive and thrive in the Unity alliance, it must now do so without its founding religious order. The Daughters of Charity are cutting ties maintained since they began St. Mary's in 1857.

Less than three years after the alliance formed, in the face of steadily accruing debt, Unity Health announced Dec. 1 that the Daughters of Charity are withdrawing their sponsorship of Unity Health.

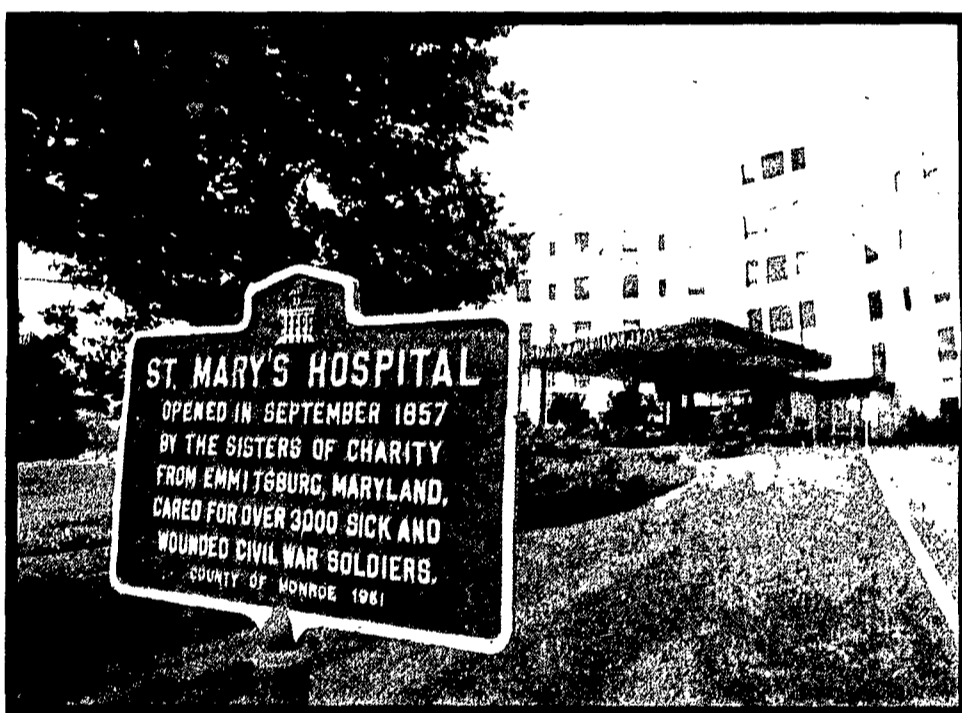
Thus ends a 142-year span of Catholic hospital care in Monroe County.

The national Daughters of Charity Health System announced their withdrawal one month after merging with the Sisters of St. Joseph Health System. That new alliance, Ascension Health, is based in St. Louis, Mo.

According to the Dec. 1 statement by Unity, the Daughters of Charity/Ascension committed "well over \$100 million in cash and other financial commitments" to the Rochester partnership.

Sister Marie Burns, DC, Unity's outgoing chairwoman, acknowledged to the *Courier* that Unity had run up a \$66 million line of credit with the Daughters of Charity/Ascension since 1997. Sister Burns said that in closing the line of credit, Ascension agreed to forgive half of the \$66 million.

Sister Burns added that at the time of the alliance, the Daughters of Charity health system had also committed \$40 million to as-



sist with restructuring and \$5 million in start-up monies.

Unity noted that it had sustained "large operating losses" since the partnering due to a health-care environment that included "shifts in reimbursement, changes in care delivery and the increasing penetration of managed care."

"I feel proud of what has been accomplished, with the integration of the boards and medical staffs of both hospitals," Sister Burns told the *Courier*.

"But I feel frustrated that we couldn't turn the financial picture around," Sister Burns added.

The relationship also consolidated inpatient medical/surgical facilities at Park Ridge, eliminated duplication of services and opened or expanded others.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark said in a statement that he regrets the withdrawal by Ascension. He expressed "deep and genuine appreciation to the Daughters of Charity for their commitment and their leadership in providing the highest quality of mission-driven Catholic health care to the Rochester community."

Father Joseph Hart, diocesan vicar general, said that the decision by Ascension to leave Unity "is beyond the bishop's jurisdiction." He said that Bishop Clark's primary role with Catholic health-care institutions under his see is to enforce Catholic ethics and directives.

Under the new arrangement, Unity will retain the St. Mary's facility as well as all other elements of the health system — but not

necessarily the St. Mary's name.

At the national level, Pam Wong, Ascension spokesperson, said that Ascension officials were still working out final details of their withdrawal from Unity, and that it would be inappropriate to comment further.

Sister Burns said those details were to be announced possibly as soon as this week. At that point, Sister Burns will vacate her position as Unity chairperson, which she has held since Unity's inception. She will be succeeded by Patricia Wehle, the alliance's vice-chairperson.

Sister Burns added that there was only a slim chance that the seven Daughters of Charity still working for Unity — three as volunteers and four as paid staff members — would remain in the Rochester area. Future placement, she added, would be determined by the Daughters of Charity provincial superior in Albany.

The bottom line

Unity officials said that the alliance's operating losses were largely unforeseen and difficult to predict.

"Putting two hospitals together required people to make budget projections for an entity that had never existed before," said William Pickett, who serves on Unity's board of directors and its finance committee. Pickett is also director of the diocesan Office of Planning.

For instance, Pickett said, "Implementing a new computer system was tremendously more expensive than it was expected to be."

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