

CONTINUED...

St. Mary's

Continued from page 1

Pickett added that the Unity alliance also coincided with the slowing of federal and state funds, such as the Balanced Budget Act of 1997, which greatly reduced Medicare reimbursements to hospitals.

"Unity clearly got caught in that time of transition," Pickett said.

"This environment is changing so fast," agreed Stewart Putnam, Unity's executive vice-president and chief operating officer.

Pickett said that the Daughters of Charity/Ascension had been covering Unity's entire monthly operating deficit. He added that Park Ridge, also a not-for-profit hospital, had no resource to help manage the debt.

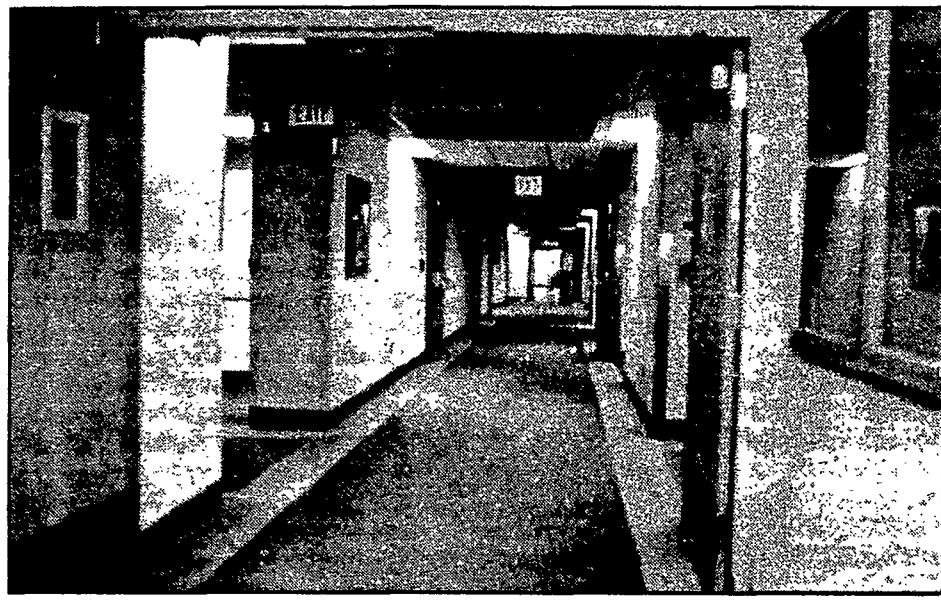
Sister Burns said she agreed in principle with the withdrawal because Unity was depleting resources of other Daughters of Charity/Ascension health-care institutions around the country.

"It's the monies of all the hospitals. Everything goes into one pot, and we've been drawing on the pot," she said.

Sister Burns went on to say that St. Mary's Hospital has been a financial liability for much of its existence, due to the Daughters of Charity's commitment to serving the poor. In addition, she said, St. Mary's urban location has deterred people who are not poor from going there.

Father Hart remarked that Ascension showed extreme generosity with the terms of their withdrawal from Unity.

"They leave, carrying with them, a substantial debt in order to give Unity the best possible ability to survive this crisis," Father Hart said.



A St. Mary's Hospital hallway Dec. 3 lacked the former bustle of the hospital's heydays. Mike Mergen/Photo Intern

"They could have said, 'You owe us money' and put Unity into bankruptcy," Pickett added. "We're talking real money here."

Putnam said that staffing cuts due to the Unity merger are largely completed, and that Ascension's withdrawal will not affect that situation.

Unity currently employs 3,082 people — a decrease of 650 positions since the alliance was formed. This year Unity has laid off 21 physicians, including 11 in November.

Putnam said that the agreement with the Ascension should help Unity get into the black by early 2000.

"I'd see 2000, 2001 as being pretty solid for us," Putnam said.

On the other hand, Putnam doesn't

know what the future holds for Unity with the absence of its sponsor.

"We're out of the woods — until we walk into the next woods," he said.

Pickett said that the forgiveness of debt by Ascension puts Unity in an unexpected position of strength for the time being. For that reason, Pickett doesn't feel Unity is obligated to align itself with another health-care system at this time. He pointed out that Rochester's two other hospital systems, ViaHealth and Strong Care, are struggling to get out of the red as well.

Strong Health includes Strong Memorial and Highland hospitals. ViaHealth comprises Genesee and Rochester General hospitals.

Catholic ethics

Talks of a new alliance by Unity would no longer require adherence to Catholic ethics and directives, as St. Mary's partnership with Park Ridge required.

Even so, Putnam said that Unity intends to continue the same ethical values under which Unity was formed. For instance, Putnam said, Park Ridge Hospital has never performed abortions.

Unity had announced over the summer that it would begin talks with ViaHealth about potential future collaborations. And, Unity's Dec. 1 statement noted that Ascension was withdrawing, in part, "to allow Unity to proceed with other strategic initiatives."

However, Putnam said that discussions with ViaHealth have not taken place, and that Unity has no imminent plans to align with another Rochester health-care system. Even without the Daughters of Charity's presence, Putnam said he has concerns over the fact that "prohibitive procedures take place at the other two systems (Strong Health and ViaHealth)."

"I think the values of St. Mary's and the Daughters have had an impact on Park Ridge Hospital," added Jack Balinsky, diocesan director of Catholic Charities. "I hope they can continue."

Timothy McCormick, Unity's president, voiced those intentions in a Nov. 29 letter to Bishop Clark.

"We will continue to honor what Catholic identity means: care of the poor, spiritual care as a part of healing, responsible stewardship of goods, respect for life," McCormick stated.

Unity Health was formed under the
Continued on next page

Southern Tier hospitals draw attention to Medicare cuts

By Mike Latona
Staff writer

The message from Catholic hospitals in the Rochester Diocese is urgent: Federal budget cuts are threatening to kill vital services.

St. Joseph's Hospital was spurred into action after the 1997 federal Balanced Budget Act threatened to reduce Medicare allotments by \$7.5 million over a five-year period to the Elmira hospital.

"When the business of a Catholic hospi-

tal is 53 percent Medicare, such as ours, those are tremendous cuts," commented Denis Sweeney, St. Joseph's director of marketing and community development.

To protest this mounting crisis, Sweeney traveled to Washington, D.C., in early October when the Catholic Health Association unveiled a national advertising campaign detailing the impact of funding cuts. Sweeney also discussed the cuts with U.S. Rep. Amory Houghton Jr. of Corning (R-31st Dist.) and state Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY).

"They were very positive meetings," Sweeney said.

To alert local people, St. Joseph's has run television ads this fall in Chemung County, urging the community to petition President Clinton to fulfill his moral obligation to temper the cuts.

"I would like to characterize it using my sports analogy, that we used a full-court press," Sweeney said.

Sweeney said the cuts weighed into St. Joseph's announcement last month that it is eliminating 28 staff positions in an effort to trim \$1.2 million in expenses.

The CHA conference was also attended by Sister Ann Miller, RSM, vice-president of mission services at St. James Mercy Health in Hornell. Sister Miller said that the Balanced Budget Act would potentially cripple St. James Mercy by \$6 million. She added that St. James Mercy forwarded more than 2,000 postcards protesting the cuts.

The efforts apparently had some positive results; Sweeney said that the issue "finally made the radar screen at Congress." In late November, President Clinton signed the Balanced Budget Refinement Act, which will relieve \$17 billion of a projected \$115

billion in cuts over five years.

While Sweeney and Sister Miller are pleased that their deficits will be smaller, they noted that the reductions will lop only a small percentage off their previously projected Medicare losses. For instance, Sweeney said, St. Joseph's will benefit by slightly over \$1 million from the Balanced Budget Refinement Act — still leaving a \$6.5 million hole.

"It's a small drop in a big bucket," Sweeney said.

"This relief is a small thing. But we're not finished yet," Sister Miller added.

Although the cuts have not resulted in layoffs or slashing of programs at St. James Mercy, Sister Miller said she fears that outpatient services may soon be threatened.

And Sister Marie Castagnaro, SSJ, president of St. Joseph's Hospital, said that such services as alcohol rehabilitation are in danger because of the crisis.

"We're going to be forced to look at those very needed services," Sister Castagnaro said. "As long as they continue to cut reimbursements to us, marginal services are going to go."

If the tide does not turn soon, Sister Castagnaro added, "We're going to be scrambling to figure out how to take care of patients in hospitals."

However, Sister Castagnaro said she doesn't see the crisis threatening her hospital's existence.

"I believe St. Joseph's will be here, I have no doubt of that," she stated.

Sister Castagnaro said she foresees St. Joseph's sharing more services with other Southern Tier hospitals, but doesn't envision a full-fledged alliance such as those that have formed in Monroe County.

COURIER CLASSIFIEDS

GENERAL

Announcements

ADOPTIONS The Catholic Courier does not publish adoption advertising. To obtain a list of agencies that serve birth mothers and adoptive parents, call 716-328-4340. Agencies wishing to be included on this list may send information to the Catholic Courier.

MERCHANDISE

Antiques

Furniture, Trunks, Clocks, Sterling and China, Linens. Wanted: complete estates and households. Sell to me for cash or I will conduct a sale for you.

Marilyn's Antiques
716-647-2480

Bronzed Baby Shoes



Bronzed Baby Shoes
247-0903

Miscellaneous

Mass for Shut-ins Every Sunday
WHEC Channel 10, 7:30 am
and Hornell Channel 6, 1:00 pm

SERVICES

Ceiling Repair

TEXTURED/SWIRLED CEILINGS: 9' x 12' ceiling only \$59! Water damage, drywall, plaster repairs. Any size patches or repairs. Quality work; reasonable prices. 716/392-5076.

Handyman

PROFESSIONAL HANDYMAN SEKS SNOWPLOWING, interior painting, gutter cleaning/repair, waterproofing, tree/bush trimming, odd jobs. Reasonable rates. Insured. 716/669-2584.

Home Improvement

CARPENTRY: Handyman service. Will do odd jobs. No job too small. Call Ken 716/247-8785.

Moving and Hauling

K-D Moving & Storage, Inc.
Experience in office, household moving and deliveries.
Big or Small, We do them All!
473-6610/473-4357
23 Arlington St. Rochester NY 14607
NYDOT#9657

SERVICES

Painting & Wallcovering

AL MEYVIS, JR.: Interior painting. Basement walls repaired/painted. Gutters cleaned. Small jobs welcome. Certified. 392-4435 or 323-2876.

Travel

Join our pilgrimage to Rome and Lourdes Nov. 6, 2000 with local priest. Call 637-2119 for brochure

All Seasons Travel.
637-2119

Call
716-328-4340
to advertise
in the
Courier
classifieds!

Calabresella's for the holidays!

If you have family or friends out of state & want to send them a gift of Zweigle's hot dogs (red or white), call or fax us to place an order. We can send anywhere in the U.S.!

www.NYStyleDeli.com

ph 716-235-7860 • fax 716-235-5388

Michael R. Yackiw
Funeral Home

1270 Norton Street
544-5000
1650 Empire Blvd.
671-6680

