



St. Joseph's
Health Care Society

an orientation to the history and purpose of the Society

CATHOLIC HEALTH CARE IN CANADA

Many years before Canada had universal health care, groups of Catholic nuns worked with ingenuity in communities across the country to respond to the needs of those who were sick or disadvantaged. The incredible efforts of these pioneering women not only laid the roots of Catholic health care in Canada but also the foundation for the health system we enjoy today.

This is a story that goes back over 400 years and follows the legacy of congregations of visionary Sisters as they responded to health and social needs by taking out bank loans, raising donations, and assuming responsibility for hospitals, orphanages and other facilities that provided compassionate, person-centred care.

The Sisters' unwavering dedication to this model of care was rooted in their belief in the sacredness and dignity of every person and commitment to "go and do likewise" by following in Jesus' ministry of healing and care.

As government funding gradually became available and the structures of today's health system established, the Sisters continued to provide steadfast care within the organizations they had founded as well as explore new and innovative ways to meet the needs of sick and vulnerable persons.

THE SISTERS OF ST. JOSEPH



Our connection to this incredible history of compassionate health care is through the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Joseph who were formed in France in 1650 [1].

The Sisters were courageous pioneers and leaders, and shortly after arriving in London in 1868 went on to establish over the next several decades centres of care that were pillars within the communities they served, beginning in London and then spreading out to Chatham and Sarnia [2]

From very early on the Sisters looked to lay collaborators (physicians, nurses, support services, volunteers) to assist in their efforts. In the 1960s, Boards of Trustees were established to share responsibility for the governance of the health care facilities founded by the Sisters and in decision-making that would be faithful to the principles and values of the Roman Catholic tradition.

With the onset of an increasingly complex environment around the delivery of health care in Ontario in the 1990s, and in conjunction with the Congregation having fewer members capable of serving in health care, the Sisters recognized the need to change their model and therefore decided to establish separate corporations for each of the health care facilities they operated as well as place administration in the hands of well-qualified laypeople.

ESTABLISHING A SPONSOR

To accompany their transition out of operations and governance, the Sisters also formed the St. Joseph's Health Care Society in 1993 to take up the role of Sponsor. A Sponsor is a Public Juridic Person (PJP), a term which comes from the Code of Canon Law [3].

A Sponsor acts on behalf of the Catholic Church to ensure that the mission of Catholic health and the treasure of the Sisters' health care ministry continues to be animated and celebrated, now and into the future. A sponsor is a steward, accountable to the church for a health care organization's Catholic identity, ministry as well as its commitment to excellence in operations and care [4].



THE ST. JOSEPH'S HEALTH CARE SOCIETY

As a Sponsor, the mission of the St. Joseph's Health Care Society is to sustain the hospitals, hospices and other ministries it sponsors to further the care that the Sisters of St. Joseph established through their long and honoured history that maintains the healing mission of Jesus as well as sponsor and support other initiatives that improve the health of the community within the Diocese of London. The Society is governed by a Board of Directors and managed by a CEO.

Each of the organizations sponsored by the Society is a not-for-profit corporation under either the "Ontario Not-for-Profit Corporations Act" or the "Canada Not-for-Profit Corporations Act," and as such they each have a Board of Directors accountable for governance and a management team responsible for strategic decisions and ensuring high quality health care delivery.

While in the case of most non-faith based health care organizations the Board of Directors and the Members of the corporation are the same people, in a Catholic organization the Members are the Catholic Sponsors. This means that the Board of the Society has some important responsibilities to fulfil as the Members of each organization it sponsors. These are known as **reserved powers or responsibilities**, and through exercising them, the Society fulfills its canonical obligations as the owner of a health care ministry [5].



THE RESERVED POWERS/ RESPONSIBILITIES ARE THE FOLLOWING:

- To approve the appointment of Board Directors, CEOs/Presidents and Executive Directors.
- To approve the by-laws of each member organization.
- To approve any change to the member organization's mission, values or philosophy.
- To approve any integration, merger or dissolution.
- To approve any major financial decision or indebtedness [6].

Reserved powers are typically exercised at annual general meetings held by the Society and in conjunction with each sponsored organization.

WORKING WITH SPONSORED ORGANIZATIONS

The Society is committed to working with each organization it sponsors in ways that further their mission, enables them to operate in a manner consistent with the teachings of the Catholic Church, and honours the legacy of the Sisters of St. Joseph. This is accomplished in the following ways:

- The Society first seeks recommendations from the Boards of its sponsored organizations on all items requiring approval by the Society, to ensure due diligence has occurred. This approach is in keeping with the **principle of subsidiarity**.
- The Society promotes a commitment to ethical integrity in all its sponsored organizations, with the Health Ethics Guide as the foundation for ethical decision making and codes of ethics.
- The Society ensures there is an active and committed spiritual care service in all of its sponsored organizations that effectively meets the spiritual needs of all patients.
- The Society is committed to ensuring that its sponsored organizations make prudent decisions regarding financial allocation of resources in service to the highest quality of care.



WHAT IT MEANS FOR A HEALTH CARE ORGANIZATION TO BE CONSIDERED CATHOLIC

Today, the Society is the proud sponsor and owner of **St. Joseph's Health Care - London, St. Joseph's Hospice - London, and St. Joseph's Hospice - Sarnia/Lambton, and Hospice of Elgin.** For any health care organization to be considered Catholic, they must demonstrate the following criteria:

- Be sponsored, which provides the link to the Church.
- Provide care to people without regard or judgment about a person's race, faith, circumstances, or life choices.
- Have a strategic priority of responding to the unmet need in the community it serves.
- Show evidence of providing high-quality, sustainable services.
- Be financially stable.
- Have a spiritual purpose [7].



THE FUTURE

The footprint of Catholic health care on the Canadian health system is vast. Millions of Canadians seek care and services at Catholic health facilities each year, and they respond with compassion, innovation, and patient-centredness. This service is carried out across the country by 129 Catholic health care facilities and under the sponsorship of 14 different Sponsors.

Looking forward, as our health care system is continually being transformed and reshaped, sponsorship must continue to grow and evolve to ensure the vitality and viability of Catholic involvement for generations to come. Consideration must be given to new strategies to guarantee that our mission remains vibrant and relevant in the future.

Relationships with new community partners, diocesan ministries and other pivotal relationships need to be formed and strengthened. These partnerships are essential for addressing the social determinants of health, the complex web of interrelated social and economic factors that shape the well-being of individuals and communities.

This widened understanding of health and well-being engages the Society not only partnering to understand better and respond to real community needs but also in living out the ministry of the Sisters of St. Joseph who with courage and creativity sought ever new ways to serve and care. **This ministry has become our mission.**

NOTES:

[1] This history is wonderfully captured in the book *Sister: The History of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London* (second printing, 2019).

[2] Beginning with the founding of St. Joseph's Hospital, London in 1888, the Sisters went on to establish St. Joseph's Hospital, Chatham, in 1890 and St. Joseph's Hospital, Sarnia, in 1946. The hospital corporations of St. Joseph's Sarnia and St. Joseph's Chatham were eventually dissolved with the founding of the nondenominational regional facilities of Bluewater Health (2010) and Chatham-Kent Health Alliance (2018) respectively.

[3] *The Code of Canon Law* (1983) sets the norms for ministries within the Roman Catholic Church including health care. https://www.vatican.va/archive/cod-iuris-canonici/cic_index_en.html

[4] According to canon law, a sponsor is "ordered for a purpose which is in keeping with the mission of the Church" with certain obligations and rights (Canon 114) and is required to "function with the diligence of a good householder" (Canon 1284). Canon 806 emphasizes that a ministry of the Church must operate at a level of quality that is at least equally as good as that achieved by peer organizations.

[5] Daniel C. Conlin, JCD, "Sponsorship at the Crossroads," *Health Progress* (July-August, 2001), <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article/july-august-2001/sponsorship-at-the-crossroads>. See also Frank Morrissey, OMI, JCD, "Our Sponsors: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow," *Health Progress* (July-August, 2013), <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article/july-august-2013/our-sponsors-yesterday-today-and-tomorrow>.

[6] See Catholic Health Alliance of Canada, *Forming Health Care Leaders: A Guide*, (2009), pp. 27-28, https://www.chac.ca/documents/434/Forming_Health_Care_Leaders_-_A_Guide.pdf and Catholic Health Association of the United States, "Overview of Sponsorship," (2014) <https://www.chausa.org/docs/default-source/sponsorship/overviewofsponsorship-karensuesmith.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

[7] See Frank Morrissey, OMI, JCD, "Canon Law - What Does Canon Law Say about the Quality of Sponsored Works?" *Health Progress* (March-April 2007), <https://www.chausa.org/publications/health-progress/article/march-april-2007/canon-law---what-does-canon-law-say-about-the-quality-of-sponsored-works-> and Catholic Health Alliance of Canada, *Forming Health Care Leaders: A Guide*, pp. 85-89.

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