



The *Great* Canadian
Catholic Hospital History Project

Documenting the legacy and contribution of the
Congregations of Religious Women in Canada,
their mission in health care, and the founding and operation of Catholic hospitals.



Projet de la *Grande* Histoire
des hôpitaux catholiques au Canada

Retracer l'héritage et la contribution des
congrégations de religieuses au Canada,
leur mission en matière de soins de santé ainsi que la fondation et l'exploitation des hôpitaux catholiques.

**A Brief History of the
Misericordia Hospital
1900-2000**

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Edmonton, AB

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*Honouring
Our
Past*

1900

2000
*Celebrating
Our
Future*

Misericordia

*A Brief History
of the
Misericordia
Hospital*

1900-2000



Healing the Body Enriching the Mind Nurturing the Soul



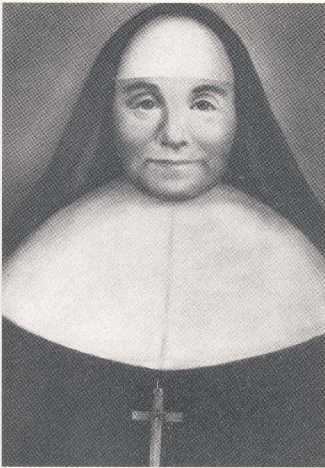
CARITAS HEALTH GROUP



A Brief History of the Misericordia: Honouring our Past, Celebrating our Future

"The Misericordia Sisters were never content with their achievements. Their sense of purpose and their faith in God enabled them to persevere with the years of construction on the building and to continue to provide better health care. The modern day Misericordia Hospital is a legacy to Edmontonians of the faith, courage and pioneering spirit of the Misericordia Sisters."

from *The Misericordia Hospital: 85 Years of Service in Edmonton*
by John Gilpin (1985)



Founding of Misericordia Sisters

The foundress of the Misericordia Sisters was born Rosalie Cadron in Lavaltrie Parish, Quebec on January 27, 1794. At age 17 she married Jean-Marie Jette. They had ten children, five of whom died quite young. Rosalie was widowed early in life but despite this she retained her faith, composure and concern for others. Although her life was concerned primarily with her many family responsibilities, she managed to carry on with her charitable works. In 1845 the Bishop of Montreal, Msgr. Ignace Bourget, asked Rosalie to take up the task of caring for unwed mothers.

Thus at the age of 50 Rosalie established the St. Pelagie Hospice, a maternity hospital for single mothers. At the same time, she opened a Postulate for herself and her associates. Their religious community was constituted as the Soeures de Misericorde (the Misericordia Sisters, or Sisters of Mercy) on January 16, 1848 in a ceremony conducted by Bishop Bourget.

Known as Mere de la Nativite, the Foundress of the Misericordia Sisters died on April 5, 1864, having fully achieved the goal of creating an institution to administer to the spiritual and material needs of unwed pregnant women.

The Misericordia Sisters Move to Edmonton

The mission of the Misericordia Sisters continued to grow, both in scope and geographical area. Initially the Sisters focused on the needs of unwed mothers-to-be, placing their newborn children in the orphanage run by the Grey Nuns. Eventually

one of the hospital floors was converted to an orphanage and soon a new building had to be constructed to house the orphanage, laundry, workshops, children's wards, infirmaries, nurses' rooms and operating rooms.

The Misericordia Sisters moved beyond Montreal in 1878 when they accepted the invitation of the Bishop of Ottawa to establish a mission there. Missions were established in New York in 1887 and Winnipeg in 1898.

In 1900, Bishop Grandin of the St. Albert Diocese invited the Sisters to establish a mission in the frontier community of Edmonton in what was then the North-West Territories. On December 10, 1899, Bishop Grandin wrote in a letter to the Mother Superior of the Misericordia Sisters in Winnipeg:

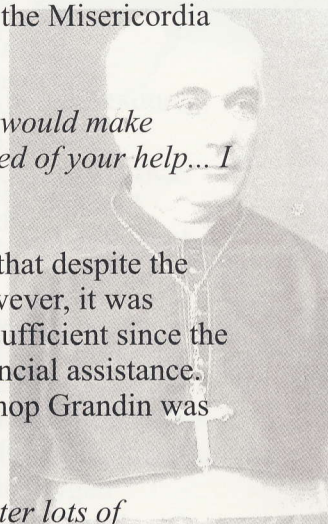
If moral misery were sufficient to draw you to us, I would make initiatives to this direction for we certainly have need of your help... I beg you in grace to come to our assistance.

Negotiations soon began, and the sisters discerned that despite the obstacles, God was calling them to Edmonton. However, it was understood that the mission would have to be self-sufficient since the Mother House was not in a position to provide financial assistance. When he heard that four Sisters would be sent, Bishop Grandin was overjoyed. He wrote to the Mother Superior:

I am quite certain that these good girls will encounter lots of difficulties and some that they don't count on. As you know, this is the seal of the work of God. But why fear, He will be on our side when we will look for his Glory.

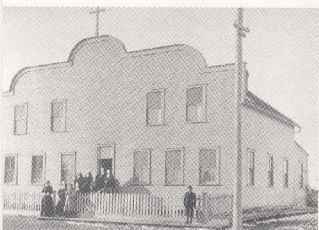
Getting Started

On May 29, 1900, four sisters stepped off the train at Strathcona Station and wasted no time in getting their maternity hospital ready. A warehouse was purchased at the southwest corner of 111 Avenue and 98 Street to serve as a temporary facility.



The August 27, 1900 issue of the *Edmonton Bulletin* reported:

The new provisional maternity hospital is now being fitted up by the Sisters of Mercy. The property is in the west end of town, opposite Norris & Carey's old store. The lots and buildings were purchased from J. Norris at a cost of \$600, and the buildings are being refitted at a cost of \$1,500... No expense will be spared in fitting up the building now occupied.



On August 29, 1900, the Sisters moved into the (still unfinished) hospital. The Maternity Hospital of the Misericordia Sisters was a specialized institution designed to meet the needs of unwed mothers-to-be and their babies. It was to complement the role of Edmonton's first hospital, the Edmonton General, opened five years earlier by the Grey Nuns. The population of Edmonton at that time was about 3,000.

1900: A New Hospital for Edmonton

The first patient was admitted on September 1, 1900 and about 200 patients were admitted over the next five years. Most, however, were not the unmarried pregnant women for whom the hospital was built; patients included married women and some men.

Thus what was to be strictly a maternity hospital became a multi-purpose institution which included an orphanage and boarding residence, as well as a general medical hospital.

While the sisters were operating the hospital, they were also working on plans for a permanent

structure. Sites on both sides of the river were considered; the location finally chosen was in the Oliver district of Edmonton - on the west side of 111th Street, between 98th and 99th Avenues.

On May 2, 1905, a building permit for construction of the new hospital was issued. The estimated cost was \$55,000.

1906: A Permanent Structure

The first permanent Misericordia Hospital opened on March 19, 1906. In contrast to the wood construction of the temporary structure, the new building was a large brick edifice complete with mansard roof, corner turret, and iron cresting on the rooftop. The main floor contained the reception area and office space, and the third floor held the wards for male patients. The obstetrical department occupied the second floor, including its own kitchen and operating room.

The opening of the new facility dramatically increased the patient load in the hospital. The hospital chronicles reported on July 4, 1906:

Today there is a lot of activity in the hospital; one is barely able to deal with all the strangers and visitors... We are beginning to truly feel the effects of becoming a general hospital.

A vital part of the new Misericordia Hospital was the School of Nursing. The school graduated its first nurse in September 1909 and produced 43 more nurses by 1922.

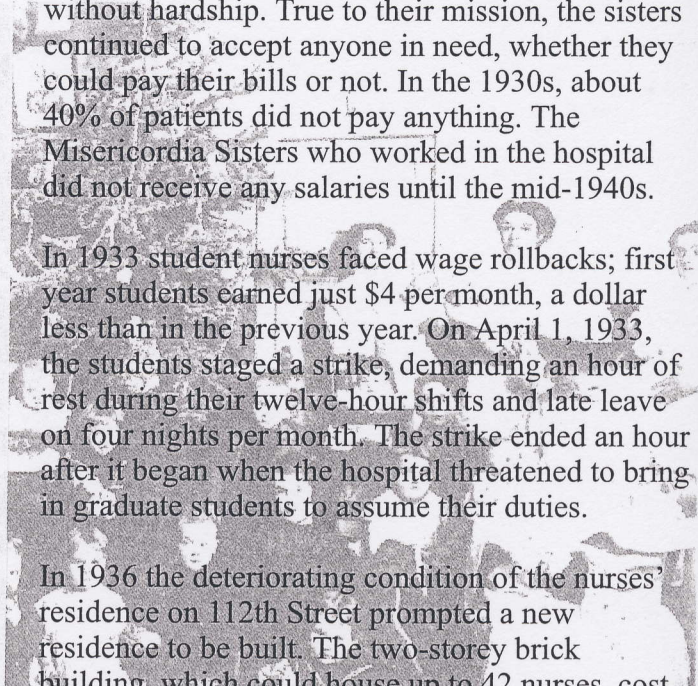
The number of patients grew from 401 admissions in 1906 to 1,575 in 1919. The increase resulted from both the growth of the city and the spread of diseases like smallpox, scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, chickenpox, typhoid fever, and influenza.

Renovations and Additions from 1906 to 1939

In the 16 years following its opening, the hospital remained much the same except for the addition of sun rooms on the south side in 1914. A further addition was made to the hospital in 1922, raising the

number of beds to 175. With this addition, the hospital almost doubled in size from the first permanent structure.

The hospital continued to serve the people of Edmonton throughout the depression, though not without hardship. True to their mission, the sisters continued to accept anyone in need, whether they could pay their bills or not. In the 1930s, about 40% of patients did not pay anything. The Misericordia Sisters who worked in the hospital did not receive any salaries until the mid-1940s.



In 1933 student nurses faced wage rollbacks; first year students earned just \$4 per month, a dollar less than in the previous year. On April 1, 1933, the students staged a strike, demanding an hour of rest during their twelve-hour shifts and late leave on four nights per month. The strike ended an hour after it began when the hospital threatened to bring in graduate students to assume their duties.

In 1936 the deteriorating condition of the nurses' residence on 112th Street prompted a new residence to be built. The two-storey brick building, which could house up to 42 nurses, cost \$16,500. In the late 1930s, as the depression showed signs of abating, plans for a new maternity wing began in earnest.

Post-War Transformations

On January 20, 1940 the new maternity wing was opened. The fact that the first addition in nearly 20 years was devoted to maternity care reflected the Sisters' commitment to this type of care. This wing was the first in a series of additions that would radically transform both the appearance and operation of the hospital.

In 1949 a new nurses' residence was built, which - for the first time - consolidated the Misericordia Hospital School of Nursing into one building. Amenities included lounges on all four floors, chapel, recreation room, classrooms and science laboratory.

After the war, the creation of the Misericordia Hospital Welfare Centre, under the direction of Sister St. Francis Cabrini, ensured that unwed pregnant women and orphans would continue to be cared for. The nursery eventually closed, due to the deteriorating condition of the facility and the trend to place children in foster homes rather than maintain them in an orphanage.

Other additions followed during the post-War oil boom. In May 1950 a new east wing was announced to "allow for division of the Misericordia Hospital into specialized departments such as orthopedic, surgical, medical, urological, and others in accordance with the latest methods of hospital arrangement." (However, the traditional arrangement of segregating men and women continued). The \$500,000 wing was officially opened in June of 1952, and was the first part of the hospital to have "automatic elevators."

Another wing, this one on the west side, was constructed in 1955 at a cost of \$760,000. This addition included eight operating rooms, two of which were equipped with glass-enclosed observation galleries and sound systems for teaching purposes. The rest of the new wing contained men's wards, and children's wards complete with toys and play tables.

1969: A new Active Treatment Hospital

Despite the additions to the hospital, the older portions became increasingly difficult to maintain in proper order. This became dramatically evident in 1964 when the hospital's boiler blew up. That, together with changes in health care management (increased involvement by the provincial and federal governments, advances in medical technology and increased public demand for health services) and the expansion of Edmonton's boundaries, prompted plans for an entirely new facility.

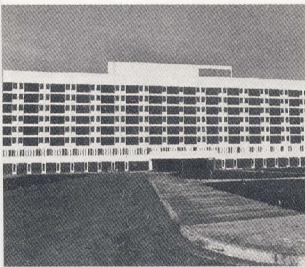
In May 1961, the Misericordia Sisters outlined plans for a major medical and social service complex to be built on 50 acres of land they purchased in west Edmonton. According to a joint statement with the Government of Alberta, the plans included a home for unwed mothers, an active treatment hospital, a nursing school, and an auxiliary hospital. The sisters would be responsible for the first three.

In 1962 Pineview Home for unwed mothers was completed and administered by the Sisters. The Government-operated Lynnwood Auxiliary Hospital was opened in 1966. By July 1969, the construction of the new hospital was complete. Like the original hospital opened by the Sisters in 1900, the new facility was on the western outskirts of Edmonton. The size of the new Misericordia Hospital in comparison to the first building was a dramatic demonstration of the growth of the institution and the community it served. It also demonstrated the continued ability of the Sisters to meet the challenge of providing quality health care to the residents of Edmonton.

The new Misericordia was an eight-storey building with a capacity of 555 beds and 100 bassinets, constructed at a final cost of \$21 million. The new hospital was part of a medical complex that included an eleven-storey tower for the School of Nursing, a utility services building, a twenty-room Sisters' residence wing and a chapel.

Appropriately, the last patient admitted at the old site was a single woman in labour. She was taken to the new hospital, where her baby was the first to be born at the new facility.

When it opened in the summer of 1969, the size and design of the Misericordia distinguished it from the old building. Services were enhanced and



the number of staff increased by over 350 employees in the first year. The maternity department consisted of ten labour rooms and four delivery suites. The new intensive care unit could accommodate thirteen patients; the old hospital could handle only four. Thirty-eight beds were provided for psychiatric patients compared to the fourteen beds in the old hospital.

The emergency department was expanded to include two operating rooms, two casting rooms, seven treatment rooms and six examination rooms. The departments of Rehabilitation Medicine and Radiology also benefited from the space available at the new facility.

As the hospital grew, so did its relationship with the community. A growing corps of volunteers became a vital part of the hospital's operations over the decades. In 1968, the Misericordia became the first hospital in Edmonton to create a department of volunteer services. In 1971, the Misericordia Hospital Volunteer Association was formed to raise funds through business services such as the gift shop and coffee shop. It was the first of its kind and has become a model for others like it in the province. Since its inception, the Association has donated all its profits back to the hospital.

The role of the Misericordia Hospital continued to evolve and change in the subsequent years. The Family Medicine Centre opened in May of 1981 in cooperation with the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Alberta. In 1985, the Misericordia had 1,600 employees working in 40 departments within the hospital. In 1991, the new south wing opened at the hospital, housing the Labour and Delivery Unit and Nursery. A feature of the new unit was the introduction of birthing rooms to create a more home-like atmosphere for mothers and fathers. Once again, a focus was placed on continually improving the quality of maternal and newborn care in the tradition established by the Sisters.

1976: Misericordia Sisters leave Edmonton

One of the most important changes in the operation of the new hospital was the departure of the Misericordia Sisters. Because of their declining numbers, along with the increasing complexity of hospital services and government involvement, the Misericordia Sisters reluctantly decided to withdraw from Edmonton. In keeping with their tradition of privacy, the withdrawal of the Misericordia Sisters from Edmonton happened gradually and without public notice.

The continuation of the mission and values of the founding Sisters was ensured through the formation of the Alberta Catholic Hospitals Foundation, with a volunteer board of directors under the jurisdiction of the Alberta Catholic Bishops. In 1976, the Foundation assumed responsibility for the Misericordia Hospital and established the Misericordia Corporation to oversee the operation of the hospital. The Misericordia was thus able to continue as a Catholic hospital under a local volunteer board of directors. (The Foundation has since changed its name to the Alberta Catholic Health Corporation and continues its role as sponsor of the organization. Its responsibilities have since grown to include sponsorship of other Catholic hospitals in Alberta.)

Forming a New Organization - Caritas Health Group

With the economic realities of the 1980s and '90s, the Board of Directors of the Misericordia began to look for innovative solutions to meet the

challenges ahead. At the same time, the Board of Directors of the General (Grey Nuns) Hospital was also searching for ways which would allow them to continue to meet the needs of their patients with fewer financial resources available. With this in mind, both hospitals began to look at solutions outside the walls of their respective institutions.

An option which eventually stood out from the rest was a possible partnership of the Misericordia and the Edmonton General (Grey Nuns) Hospitals. A task force established in March 1991 recommended that the sponsors of Grey Nuns and Misericordia Corporations form a partnership.

Caritas Health Group was created on April 1, 1992. In bringing together the resources of the two corporations, the new organization was better positioned to address the emerging challenges in health care: the economic climate, new technologies, and the needs of a diverse and aging population.

The partnership allowed for the establishment of one board of directors which would have the responsibility for the integrated operations of the two acute care facilities - the Misericordia and the Grey Nuns Hospitals - and the Edmonton General Hospital, which was focused on long term care and geriatrics. With membership drawn from the community, the Caritas board plays an important role in strengthening the organization's ties to the communities it serves.

Caritas was committed to continuing the strong community orientation which was so much a part of its members' tradition. The organization focused on developing programs and services that addressed community needs, and adopted an open and accessible approach to be fully accountable to the community.

In addition to having a common goal of providing effective health services, both corporations shared a commitment to Catholic values. The partnership was seen by many as a way of strengthening the common Catholic philosophy and mission of caring that was already evident at each facility.



The formation of Caritas heralded a new era for health care delivery in Edmonton and northern Alberta. It created the opportunity for optimizing resources in the delivery of programs and services within a community-focused framework.

Regionalization in the Province

Further challenges arose when health care in Alberta was restructured under regional authorities. In Edmonton, the volunteer Caritas board continued to operate within the framework of the new Capital Health Authority. Restructuring in the region resulted in both the Misericordia and Grey Nuns hospitals losing their critical care capacity and being redesignated as Community Health Centres.

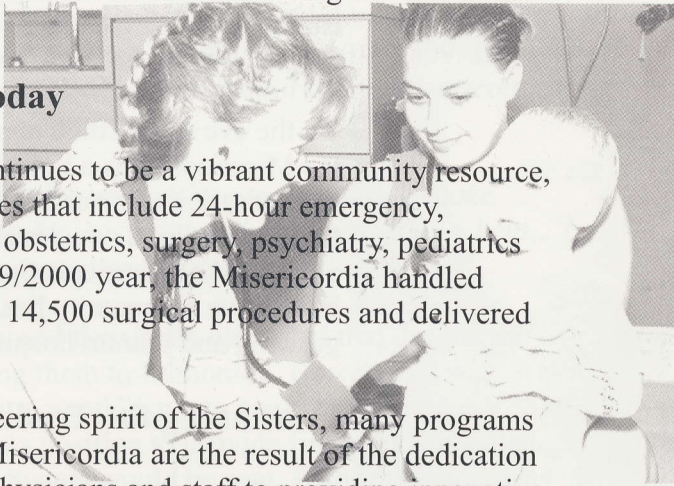
The Community Health Care concept was to take a broader approach to health by providing many of the existing hospital services, but also focusing on the needs of the community through programs in education, prevention and health promotion. There were fewer beds for in-patient treatment and more emphasis on day and short stay surgery, out-patient support services, home care and community health programs.

As a Community Health Centre, the Misericordia continued to deliver 24-hour emergency care, women's health, children's health, and mental health services and programs as well as medical and surgical care. However, confusion existed within the community about the level of services available and the need to restore the term 'hospital' became evident. In early 1997, the Misericordia's name was changed to its current form: Misericordia Community Hospital and Health Centre.

Reform to the health care system was a difficult time for everyone in the region. The consolidation of services, and the shift of low intensity/high intensity services to single sites proved to be challenging for both staff and users of the system. As a result, a complete service plan review was undertaken by Capital Health to look at changes to provide better access, better service and better coordination. A key recommendation was that acute services needed to be redistributed in the region. This meant that some services would need to be restored at Caritas facilities. In December of 1997, a decision was made to enhance the Grey Nuns Community Hospital and a commitment was made to consider enhancing services at the Misericordia.

The Misericordia Today

Today's Misericordia continues to be a vibrant community resource, providing hospital services that include 24-hour emergency, medicine, coronary care, obstetrics, surgery, psychiatry, pediatrics and geriatrics. In the 1999/2000 year, the Misericordia handled 48,000 emergency visits, 14,500 surgical procedures and delivered 2,700 babies.



In keeping with the pioneering spirit of the Sisters, many programs currently offered at the Misericordia are the result of the dedication and commitment of the physicians and staff to providing innovative ways to help those in need. Some of the special programs include the COMPRU facial reconstruction unit, the Hyperbaric Oxygen Chambers, the Chronic Wound Care Program, Lithotripsy and Urodynamics. Health promotion and community outreach programs like P.A.R.T.Y. (Prevent Alcohol and Risk Related Trauma in Youth) and the Edmonton School Lunch Program keep the Misericordia linked to the community.

Celebration of New Growth

In the fall of 1999, Caritas Health Group received the good news that the region would begin developing a proposal to enhance services and programs at the Misericordia Hospital. The following June, the

Alberta Government and Capital Health announced the allocation of \$9.7 million for the hospital to handle more seriously ill patients and perform more complex surgeries by 2001.

Through the enhancement project, the Misericordia will increase medical and surgical beds, add more complex orthopedic surgery and re-establish a critical care program to support the new patients. Capital Health is also exploring the potential for other surgery transfers in the areas of ear, nose and throat and in Oral Maxillofacial surgery within the next few years.

On the eve of its 100th anniversary celebration, the Misericordia is a hospital in transition, as planners, designers and tradesman ready the facility to offer a new level of care. At 100 years old, the Misericordia is proud to be both an innovative community health centre and a growing and vibrant hospital.

Continuing the Tradition of Caring

The Misericordia Sisters were driven by a call to serve those most in need of care. They faced up to, and overcame, the tremendous difficulties inherent in acting out their commitment to their communities. This special spirit of caring remains evident in the ongoing work of the Sisters, based in Montreal, and in their lasting legacy here.

As it has throughout its 100 years of service to Edmonton, the Misericordia Community Hospital and Health Centre depends on the tremendous dedication and commitment of its staff, volunteers and physicians who contribute to the healing ministry established by its visionary founders.

As a faith-based volunteer-governed organization, Caritas Health Group is driven by a profound sense of responsibility to carry out its mission of healing the body, enriching the mind and nurturing the soul. In fulfilling its mission, Caritas strives to combine leading-edge science with the values of faith-based care. Today, as the largest voluntary health care provider in the province, Caritas is a multi-cultural and religiously diverse organization carrying out the Catholic tradition of caring for all in need.



Compiled by Monique Trudelle and Tim Battle

Material taken from:

The Misericordia Hospital: 85 Years of Service in Edmonton *by John Gilpin (1986)*

A Framework for the Future: Creating a Model for Productive
Health Care Partnerships *(April 1991)*

When a hospital is so much more *(June 1996)*

Our Future at the Grey Nuns and Misericordia *(November 1994)*

Graphic design by: Carole Nordell, Audio Visual Services, Caritas Health Group

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