

WHY A HOSPITAL, WHICH AT ONE TIME HAD ONE OF THE
HIGHEST ABORTION RATES IN THE CITY OF MILWAUKEE,
BEARS THE NAME "LUTHERAN"

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As early as 1850, there were plans being made to open a hospital in Milwaukee. The leader of this movement was Pastor J. Muehlhaeuser of Gnaden Gemeinde. In 1855, it became increasingly clear that a hospital was needed to serve Milwaukee and its vicinity, for in that year a cholera epidemic struck. "In this trying time (Pastor) Muehlhaeuser nobly acquitted himself in not, like many, fleeing the city, but fearlessly and with untiring devotion took care of the sick and dying and ministering to their bodily as well as spiritual needs."¹ After 1855, Pastor W. Passavant, who had established Deaconess Hospital in Pittsburgh, Pa., made several visits to Milwaukee at the invitation of Pastor Muehlhaeuser, to look into the possibility of opening a hospital. It was not until August 3, 1863, however, that a hospital was finally opened.

Its opening was not an easy thing to accomplish. In June 1863, Pastor Passavant came to Milwaukee with the idea of renting a home which would be turned into a small hospital. Finding a vacant house in a fast growing city of 28,000 plus, was not an easy thing to do, in fact, it was impossible. Thus, Pastor Passavant and his supporters were faced with two choices: abandon the project or purchase property. The first was not acceptable and the second was next to impossible since it was rather difficult to buy something with no money. But a member of Pastor Muehlhaeuser's church accidentally heard of some property soon to be offered

for sale. It consisted of a large brick mansion and about eight acres of land. The purchase price was set at \$12,000 cash. A friend of Pastor Passavant loaned him a thousand dollars to close the sale and the site for the hospital was secured.

An interesting sidelight surrounding the birth of the new hospital in Milwaukee, was that at this same time, the infant Wisconsin Synod was planning to open its own seminary and college. At its convention (May 29-June 3, 1863), a major point of discussion concerned where the seminary and college should be located, Milwaukee or Watertown. One of the delegates said, "Milwaukee already was occupied with the erection of a hospital and hence it is to be feared that the interest for the seminary will be negligible."² To which Pastor Muehlhauser replied, "I feel safe in the assurance that the interest for the hospital will in no wise subtract from the interest for the seminary."³ The synod eventually decided to locate the seminary and college in Watertown.

After the sale of the property for the hospital had been closed, Pastor Schladermundt from Germantown, PA., who was in town to address the Wisconsin Synod's convention concerning the opening of a hospital in Milwaukee, moved into the brick mansion.⁴ For the next month, things were made ready so that the hospital might open. Pastor Muehlhaeuser and also Pastor Streissguth of St. John's Lutheran church went among

the members of the German community seeking and obtaining contributions for the support of the hospital. Ladies from Grace and St. John's made bedding and other articles needed in the caring for the sick. By August 3, 1863, everything was ready and the hospital was dedicated with religious services and the first patient was admitted.

Milwaukee Hospital (the original name) has been from its inception a church related deaconess hospital. It has always had a Lutheran pastor as its administrator until 1952. Those pastors who served as administrator were: "Pastor W.A. Passavant, 1863-1894, W.A. Passavant, Jr. 1895-1901, Herman Fritschel 1902-1943, and W.G. Sodt, 1943-1952."⁵ The nurses who served in the hospital were for the most part trained in the hospital's own nursing school. The deaconess has been and probably always will be an integral part of the hospital. Lutheran churches, as well as other Protestant churches have supplied financial support since its inception.

However, it was not until 1965, that the name Lutheran became part of the hospital's official name. For years it had been known as "The Passavant", while officially named Milwaukee Hospital. But in 1965, the corporation, formerly known as The Lutheran Deaconess Motherhouse at Milwaukee, became the Lutheran Hospital of Milwaukee Incorporated.

Strangely enough, it was shortly after this

time that medical abortions started to be performed at Lutheran Hospital. In the late 1960's and early 70's, Lutheran Hospital performed no less than 1/5 of the abortions performed in Milwaukee County. Today, Lutheran Hospital is one of only five hospitals in Milwaukee who still have abortions performed at them. This has been largely due to the fact that most people no longer go to hospitals to have an abortion, but rather to a clinic. Since Title XIX no longer funds abortions, hospitals have lost much of this business. However, Lutheran Hospital still permits this medical procedure to take place. This is the same hospital at whose ninetieth anniversary celebration it was prayed:

"Lord God, our heavenly Father, who are the same yesterday, today and forever, we pray let thy benediction rest upon this institution in the years to come, as it has in the past. Let the Spirit of Jesus, who went about healing all manner of diseases among the people, be the spirit prevailing in our hospital and its school. Prevent the spirit of self-seeking selfishness ever to predominate, but maintain by thy Holy Spirit the spirit of service to the afflicted."⁶

And today an ALC chaplain and a Roman Catholic priest serve as the pastoral care staff of Lutheran Hospital whose goal is to "endeavor to meet the needs of any patient of any religious background. An approach is taken by the chaplains that either chaplain might respond to a particular situation regardless of patient affiliation."⁷

Lutheran Hospital, in name, yes; in background, yes; in practice, no!

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