

Mother Mary Frances Streitel
Nominated by Jill Meilahn

This quote by Mother Mary Frances Streitel is an example of her vision to unite the active life with the contemplative, "Prayer and work must go hand in hand and like twin sisters, strive to remedy the spiritual and social misery of humankind, teaching it again what it means to pray and work."

Mother Frances Streitel founded the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother, a Catholic congregation of Franciscan religious sisters formed in Rome, Italy, in 1883, who served worldwide, particularly in the field of healthcare. The Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother participate in the mission of Jesus to bring fuller life to others by revealing the love of God for all, especially the poor.

In 1890, one year after establishing their first hospital in the United States in Wichita, KS, two Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother were approached by Father Paul Geyer to build a hospital in Marshfield, Wisconsin. He was concerned about the health of his large and "difficult" parish, especially the loggers who suffered from injuries and typhus. Mother Mary Frances Streitel, Founder of the Order, was agreeable. Her chosen name for the new hospital was St. Joseph's, for the patron saint of buildings.



Mother Mary Frances and five Sisters moved to Marshfield Dec 9, 1890. The proposed site of the hospital was across from St. John's Church, on the current site of Columbia Park. But a clear title could not be obtained so it was built "out in the country" on the hill across from the cemetery, on the street that became known as St. Joseph's. Because the hospital was not yet built, the Sisters and Father Geyer rented the home of J.J. Dumas as a temporary hospital and convent.

On Feb 2, 1891 Mother Mary Frances and the Sisters moved into the new hospital. The sisters lived in the unfinished basement, with poor heat and only the water they pumped by hand. On Feb 14, six more Sisters arrived from Rome. Though they were ready to care for patients, most people of the time were fearful of hospitals and preferred to be treated at home. The Sisters were trained in-home nurses so that is what they did, receiving payment primarily in food and garden vegetables. Money was a constant worry. A prepaid insurance program was started. People could purchase a ticket for \$5 or \$10. This entitled them to hospital care at no additional charge if they became sick or injured. The \$10 ticket also provided income (disability insurance!).

By 1910, the Sisters had added a Chapel, St. Mary's Convent School and a new hospital wing. In addition to Sisters and novices, they also educated girls from the community, preparing them to get certificates in teaching and nursing. Hospital admissions were up to 368 patients in 1910.

The Marshfield Clinic was founded in 1916 by six pioneering physicians. They recognized the importance of an existing, successful hospital in their efforts to provide excellent care for Marshfield and its surrounding large, rural community. Dr. Mason even lectured at the nursing school 4-5 evenings per week.

The City of Marshfield would certainly be a different place if Mother Mary Frances Streitel and the Sisters of the Sorrowful Mother had not invested in starting a hospital here. The community is truly indebted to her for her involvement and devotion.