

# **Obstetrical Nursing Clinical Experiences at an All Male Nursing School in the 1950s**

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# Purpose of the Research

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To explore the all male Alexian Brothers Hospital School of Nursing students' clinical experiences in obstetrical nursing in the 1950s and early 1960s

# Historical Context

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- Considering gender/gender equality
- Considering the social/cultural norms

# Alexian Brothers

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- A monastic order founded in Germany during the 14<sup>th</sup> century
- Focus on caring for the diseased, the insane, and the rejected poor
- Expanded in Germany and to Belgium
- First US congregation in 1866 in Chicago

# Alexian Brothers Hospital

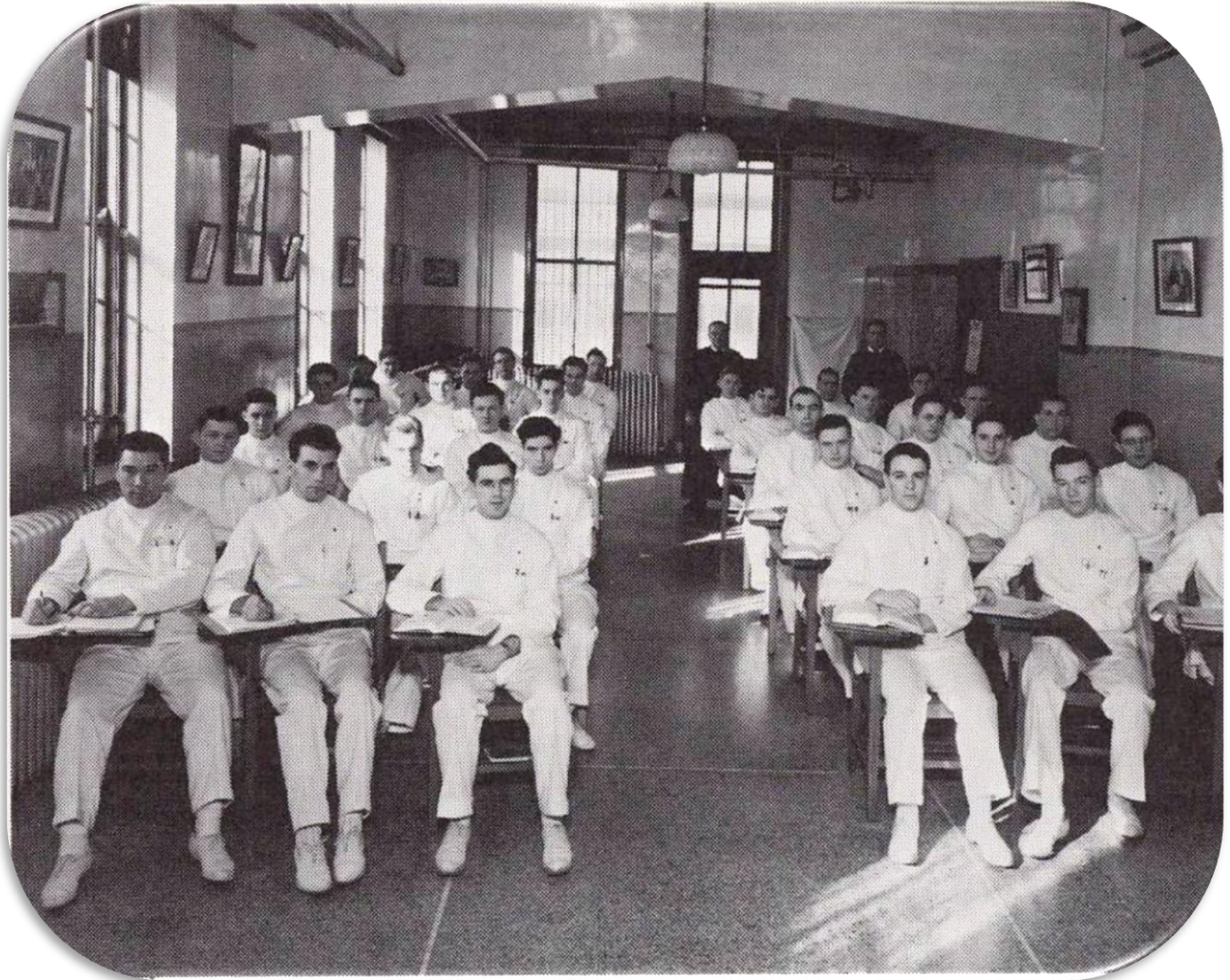
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- 1866 – First Chicago hospital – 8 beds
- 1868 – Second Chicago hospital – 70 beds
- 1962 – First female patients admitted
- 1966 – St. Alexius Hospital opened in Elk Grove Village
- 1968 – Chicago hospital closed

# The Nursing School

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- 1894 – Annual series of 24 two hour lectures by physicians
- 1898 – Alexian Brothers Hospital School of Nursing incorporated
  - Fifth all male school in the US
  - Two year program
- 1932 – 2<sup>nd</sup> nursing school to be certified in Illinois
- 1952 – National League for Nursing (NLN) accreditation
- 1966 – Decision to close the school
- 1969 – Last class graduates (21 nurses)







# Clinical Affiliations

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Remain unchanged from the previous year

- Psychiatry
- Pediatrics (different locations for lay and religious students)
- Tuberculosis

Annual Report of the School of Nursing, January 25, 1956

Other clinical experiences (urology, surgery, orthopedics) were at the Alexian Brothers Hospital

# Licensure “State Boards”

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## Five sections

- Medical
- Surgical
- Psychiatric
- Pediatric
- Obstetric

**Men were allowed to substitute urological nursing for obstetrics**

# Obstetrical Nursing

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“Recently one of our graduates was denied reciprocity in the State of Michigan for a lack of Obstetrical Nursing Experience.”

“currently doing a survey to determine the need for an Obstetric Affiliation for our students.”

Minutes of the Advisory Board, February 3, 1956

# Obstetrical Affiliation

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“Brother Maurice announced that an affiliation of eight weeks in Obstetrics at Mercy Hospital has been approved by the Board of Nurse Examiners.”

Minutes of a special meeting of the Faculty Organization,  
September 19, 1956

# Brother Maurice

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“We were lucky because we had Sister Annette [of the Mercy sisters of Chicago] who really took that as a challenge to help the Brothers to establish the OB [clinical experience]. We anticipated all kinds of problems [when we would] send the students to OB because it was a new experience for us.”

Interview, 2008

# Affiliations

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Various clinical sites were used

- Mercy Hospital
- Lewis Memorial Hospital
- St Ann's Hospital
- Holy Cross Hospital

# Students' Perspective

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## November 1956 Almoner

“We are happy to have this new experience to look forward to, since it will undoubtedly round-out the entire curriculum”

## February 1957 Almoner

### Obstetric Affiliation Begins

“In the delivery room the students scrub for deliveries or circulate, whichever is necessary. Also, the take blood pressures of women in active labor, fetal heart tones, and any other procedures as the need arises.”

# The 1957 *Diaconian*

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“There was great joy and gratitude when we were told that the proposed Obstetrics affiliation was no longer a dream but a reality. It is a realization of desires of past classes and hopes of future classes, coupled with need and perseverance. ... Sister M. Annette, R.S.M. has planned the educational program so that in addition to the experience in the nursery and the formula laboratory at Mercy Hospital, the student also receives experience in the delivery room and the out-patient clinical at Lewis Memorial Hospital.”

F Bozatt (Class of 1958)



# The Religious Students

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## **February 13, 1961 Advisory Board Minutes**

“Brother Maurice discussed the problem of the Obstetric experience for the Religious”

## **July 13, 1961 Faculty Organization Minutes**

Recommended that “they [Religious Brothers] be permitted to receive the experience for the following reasons: (a) To be eligible for licensure by endorsement in other states. (b) To be better prepared for the State Board Exam”

# The Religious Students

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## December 6, 1961 Advisory Board Minutes

“Effective immediately the Brothers would be allowed to take Obstetrics – theory and practice. This action followed the decision given to the Rector General, Pater Melchoir. This decision was made because of the difficulty that the Brothers encounter when they sought reciprocity in other states. This is especially important for the Brothers from other communities.”



Mrs. Kehoe,  
Obstetrics Instructor



MISS JOSEPHINE FISHER  
R.N.  
Obstetrics

# Jack (Class of 1958)

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- [we were treated] like we were doctors
- they had the highest, best regard for us because we come from Alexian Brothers, so and these were both Catholic hospitals too. So we got along real well; that was really good.

# Joe (Class of 1958)

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- I liked the Delivery Room cause there was anesthesia involved and I had never seen a birth before. It was quite interesting.
- We were treated quite well. There was never any animosity or remarks made or anything like that .. they were all very helpful.
- They [husbands] thought everybody was a doctor; that all the men were doctors and all women were nurses.

# Roger (Class of 1959)

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- I don't remember Mercy very much. They didn't allow us to do too much over there. It was kind of an orientation thing.
- Now Lewis was a little different. It was mostly charity.... Deliveries – [I] participated in deliveries. Did a circumcision one time. The obstetric surgeon was right there with me and said this is how you do a circumcision and I still remember – and can't believe doing that kind of thing at that age. I was just about 19.

# Vince (Class of 1959)

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- [For the] OB affiliation we went to Mercy Hospital. That's where we first began feeling the discrimination against men in nursing was at Mercy, all the females.... But then as time went on a relationship developed between the Mercy students and the ABH students and it got to be a very warm and...we really looked out for each other when we were there.

# Patrick (Class of 1962)

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- We were on eggshells at the OB affiliation because it was the first time. We were the first class of students who went to that private hospital [St Anne's].
- We had a marvelous instructor, a very mature, good good nurse
- I loved it. I did. I really did. I love Obstetrics



# Wayne (Class of 1962)

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- Chicago Maternity Center ... we went out on runs on those and that means you delivered babies in the homes which was ... fantastic. So you were very busy but it was a fantastic... we had a fantastic Clinical Instructor and it was a fantastic experience.

# [Brother] John (Class of 1966)

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[at] Holy Cross Hospital ... we arrived and then the Head Nun put us in the Utility Room ... And we sat there and folded old sponges to keep us busy ... and we did that for a day or two and finally went to Brother Maurice and said, you know, we are not going to learn anything so he had to come down and talked to the Head Sister ... the Sister in charge of Obstetrics who was not very happy with us but we had to prove ourselves. She then allowed us on the OB floor, delivery room and post partum recovery room.

# [Brother] John (Class of 1966)

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And we started a program where no baby would be discharged 'til we taught the father how to diaper. They loved it. They loved it. So ... I'd go in and say okay, we're going to diaper the baby and "I can't do that" the guy would say and we'd say you can't bring the baby home ... If I can do it, you can do it ... Now, let's do it together and I'm going to teach you ...

# State Board Results

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1958 – first class to take the Obstetrics portion

- 27 graduates (all lay students)
  - 26 passed (96.3%)

1959

- 31 graduates (1 Brother)
- 30 took the exam
  - 28 passed (93.3%)

# Sources

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- Midwest Nursing History Research Center
- Alexian Brothers Provincial Archives
- Oral History Interviews with graduates of the Alexian Brothers Hospital School of Nursing

## Secondary Sources

books and articles referencing men nurses and nursing education in the 1950s and 1960s

# Acknowledgements

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