Trinity officially takes over Loyola system Stritch School of Medicine, Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing remain part of Loyola University
By Michelle Martin
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In a June 30 ceremony that in some ways resembled a wedding, Novi, Mich.-based Trinity Health took Loyola University Health System’s hospitals and other clinical operations under its wing. The Stritch School of Medicine, Marcella Niehoff School of Nursing and other academic and research programs remain under the aegis of Loyola University Chicago.

The event was the culmination of more than nine months of talks between Trinity Health, the fourth largest Catholic health care system in the United States, with 46 hospitals in nine states, and Loyola University Health System, the only Catholic academic medical center in Illinois.

Bringing the two institutions together will strengthen Catholic health care at a time when the health care environment is being transformed, said Joseph Swedish, Trinity’s president and CEO.

As health care reform takes shape and brings more people who are now uninsured into the medical system, it’s vital that Catholic institutions be ready to welcome them, he said.

“We believe it is now more important than ever to strengthen Catholic health care,” Swedish said.

‘Long-term survival’

Having the resources of an organization like Trinity — whose revenues topped $7.1 billion last year — could ensure the survival of Loyola University Medical Center and Gottlieb Hospital, said Jesuit Father John J. O’Callaghan, vice president of mission and ministry for Loyola University Medical Center.

“They assure us long-term survival in a very different healthcare environment where to be small is to be vulnerable,” O’Callaghan said.

Trinity reportedly will assume $350 million in Loyola’s debt, as well as take responsibility for pension and other expenses of $400 million and pay $22.5 million each year to the Stritch School of Medicine. The deal closed July 1, days before two other Catholic health care systems — Resurrection and Provena — announced definite plans to combine forces.

The academic in him is excited about getting access to Trinity’s vast banks of electronic medical records, O’Callaghan said.

“Think of the research we can do,” he said.

The cooperative venture — the academic institutions will maintain a close working partnership — will also allow the officials at Loyola to amplify their voices as they advocate on health care issues, O’Callaghan said.
Honoring mission

Dominican Sister Catherine De- Clercq, Trinity’s senior vice president for governance and sponsorship, said she and her colleagues “feel blessed” to be able to combine Trinity’s community hospitals with Loyola’s academic medical center. While the two organizations bring different gifts to the table, they both honor the Catholic mission of healing the whole person.

“We serve in the spirit of the Gospel to heal the body, mind and spirit,” she said. “We attend to the soul of the person as well.”

DeClercq and O’Callaghan lit a unity candle during the transition ritual, and several people representing different roles at Loyola and Trinity — doctors, nurses, etc. — read intercessory prayers to which the standing-room-only audience responded, “May we serve together for the greater glory of God.”

“We serve together” is the beginning of Trinity’s mission statement, and “ad majorem Dei gloriam” (“for the greater glory of God”) is Loyola’s motto, taken from the Jesuits.

Cardinal George, who offered a blessing at the end of the ritual, reminded people from both Trinity and Loyola that their differences are better seen as gifts that they bring to one another than as obstacles that must be overcome, and that their shared mission will carry them forward.

“The landscape of health care is shifting so rapidly in our country,” he said. “There are many other actors who will come in with a different way of doing things.”