

ON A WING AND A PRAYER: HOUSTON NONPROFITS SUPPORT SAN JOSÉ CLINIC'S MISSION

By Grace Conroy

\$59. Fifty-nine dollars is all it took to open one of the longest-running charity clinics in the United States.

When Monsignor George T. Walsh decided to start a clinic in 1922 to battle the high infant mortality rate in Houston's Mexican community, he knew who to call on for help. With approval from Bishop Christopher Byrne, Msgr. Walsh reached out to the local National Council of Catholic Women, now the Charity Guild of Catholic Women, to aid in this endeavor. Theodora (Mrs. W. E.) Kendall, the first president of the National Council of Catholic Women, and clinic cofounder Katherine (Mrs. Lucian) Carroll each pitched in one dollar and rallied fifty-seven other council members to do the same. With these funds, they rented a frame house at 1900 Franklin Street for the Clínica Gratuita, later renamed the Mexican Clinic and then San José Clinic.¹



Sister Teresa celebrates United Way Day alongside a San José Clinic doctor, a young patient and her mother. United Way of Greater Houston's predecessor, Community Chest, began supporting the clinic in 1928.

Photo courtesy of the San José Clinic.

The first of several organizations that have supported the San José Clinic across eight decades or more, the Charity Guild continued to champion the clinic as it moved to 1909 Canal Street in 1925 to accommodate the rising number of patients. The guild women also sewed layettes for the patients' newborn babies, inspiring them later to open a consignment shop as a "blueprint for raising money." After eight years of success, the Charity Guild shop received nonprofit status in 1960. Today, the consignment shop is run by an all-volunteer staff, enabling the guild to donate to charitable organizations such as San José "by rendering assistance to children in need in the greater Houston area, regardless of race or creed."²

The Charity Guild remains a loyal donor to the San José Clinic. In 2022, the Charity Guild of Catholic Women will celebrate a century of dedicated service to the Houston community – beginning with its devotion to the clinic.

Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston

The mission of the San José Clinic is to provide healing through quality healthcare and education with respect and compassion for those with limited access to care. To accomplish this, the clinic depends on other larger nonprofits, such as the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, to provide funds to cover its operating costs. The clinic also reduces expenses through in-kind contributions it receives from medical providers, pharmaceutical companies, and community partners.

Without Bishop Byrne's concern and the dedication of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston in 1922, the San José Clinic might not exist today. The Archdiocese, which owns and provides financial assistance to the clinic, has been a constant supporter and source of spiritual leadership. During Bishop Byrne's thirty-two-year tenure, the number of Catholic churches in Houston grew from eight to twenty-eight. In turn, the clinic has been treated with kindness and devotion by five bishops. In several instances the Archdiocese gave to a specific cause, such as in 1990, when it donated \$10,000 for San José Clinic's Maternity Department.⁴ Over its history and the past few decades, specifically, the Archdiocese has donated generous sums for operating expenses through the annual Diocesan Services Fund (DSF).

His Eminence Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, who became ordinary of the Archdiocese (an officer who provides pastoral governance) and the overseer of the San José Clinic in 2004, observed that the clinic operates today in the "same exact spirit" that it did 100 years ago. "It's been a genuine, beautiful part of the Archdiocese, and we're very proud, and we'll do



Members of the Charity Guild merrily decorate the outside of their consignment shop for the holidays.

Photo courtesy of the Charity Guild of Catholic Women.

the community and his devotion to Catholicism. His two sons did not survive infancy, but his eight daughters – Marguerite, Mary Ellen, Caroline, Charlotte, Alberta, Katherine, Lillian, and Stella – grew up following in his religious fervor. Upon Scanlan's passing, they acquired a multi-million-dollar joint estate. Although he left no will designating his wishes, his daughters knew them by heart and abided by them.⁹

Scanlan's daughters had equal shares in his joint estate, with the consensus that after they had passed away, the estate would go toward “charitable and educational endeavors of the Catholic Church.” The sisters also practiced this ideal throughout their lives. One sister used Scanlan’s wealth to support the Annunciation Church, and another belonged to the Charity Guild of Catholic Women that helped fund the San José Clinic. All remained firm in their Catholic faith throughout their lives. None of the sisters married or had children, and they chose to remain mostly hidden from the public. Even in their generosity, the sisters provided out of love rather than for publicity.¹⁰

In January 1947, the surviving sisters, Lillian and Stella, created the Scanlan Foundation, born through a trust in their wills. After Lillian passed away in September of 1947, her will declared Stella Scanlan, Louie Linnenberg, and Walter Brown as the trustees of the Scanlan Foundation with the mission to support “Roman Catholic religious, charitable, and educational purposes within Texas.”¹¹

After Stella died, the Scanlan Foundation continued on the path that she and Lillian envisioned. In 1956, the foundation gifted \$160,000 to construct the San José Clinic’s new building at 301 Hamilton Street and, in the 1960s, gave another \$100,000 to renovate and double its size. The foundation recently awarded San José Clinic a \$250,000 “impact grant” for its satellite location in Rosenberg, southwest of Houston in Fort Bend County. The branch opened in 2020 after the clinic’s leadership identified a need for ongoing



Bishop Wendelin Nold and Bishop John Ludvik Morkovsky attend the groundbreaking of the San José Clinic’s new addition at Hamilton in 1969.

Photo courtesy of the San José Clinic.

anything to keep it going.” In 2020, given the difficulties of COVID-19, Cardinal DiNardo thanked those who “valiantly weathered [San José Clinic’s] 98th year of supporting uninsured brothers and sisters in need of quality healthcare.”⁵

United Way

In 1928, Houston’s Community Chest, now United Way of Greater Houston, became a financial backer for the fledgling Mexican Clinic. For almost a hundred years, United Way has strived to create a safety net for residents facing circumstances such as poverty, natural disasters, and inadequate medical care. Like San José Clinic, United Way also hopes to improve lives through better access to healthcare and by providing resources to build a stronger community.⁶

Former United Way president and CEO, Anna Babin, observed firsthand how the organization invested its time and resources into the San José Clinic. Early in her career, Babin worked as an internal auditor for United Way. In this role, she spent three weeks viewing the clinic’s facility and ensuring it was a safe and secure environment. She also checked that the clinic was properly appropriating the United Way funds. Babin’s overall analysis was that the clinic was an endearing environment where “these gentle giants of sisters really care[d] for the poor.”⁷ Babin is one of many to witness the charisma of the Sisters of Charity as they carry out the ministry and mission of the clinic.

United Way has continued to invest in the clinic because it is a “safety net for the poor.” It remains one of the San José Clinic’s largest donors, averaging approximately \$650,000 in each of the last five years.⁸

Scanlan Foundation

The Scanlan Foundation, established in 1947, is another enduring benefactor of the clinic going back seventy-four years. The foundation’s name honors Thomas “Tim” Howe Scanlan, an Irish immigrant who moved to Houston in 1853. Scanlan was a successful businessman who made his money in real estate and oil and became one of the city’s wealthiest men by the time he died in 1906. A faithful husband and loving father of ten, Scanlan’s two defining qualities were his acts of service to



In January 1947, Tim Scanlan's last surviving children, Lillian and Stella, founded the Scanlan Foundation to honor their father's wishes to support the Catholic Church's charitable work. Shown left to right are three of Scanlan's ten children: Kate, Lillian, and Stella.

Photo courtesy of the Scanlan Foundation.

medical care in the area when they responded to a call for help during Hurricane Harvey. The foundation's long-term commitment was especially evident when oil prices plummeted to about \$38 a barrel in 2014 and 2020, impacting the foundation's income. Nevertheless, foundation president Larry Massey reflected, "It pinches. But we made a point to always make San José Clinic a priority, and we have sustained that through good and bad times."¹²

Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word

Another inspiring group of Catholic women whose support has impacted the San José Clinic is the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. On June 4, 1954, the clinic came under the supervision of the congregation at the request of Bishop Wendelin Nold. Sister Angela Lamb was installed as the clinic's new administrator and Sister Dominica O'Halloran became the supervisor at the clinic. The Sisters of Charity remain involved with San José Clinic on an administrative level and a financial one through the CHRISTUS Foundation for Healthcare, whose mission and vision of "extending the healing ministry of Jesus Christ" cements the legacy of the congregation through the "promotion of health and welfare of people in need."¹³

In 2006, CHRISTUS sold St. Joseph's Hospital in Houston, which had long cared for San José patients. Even so, the foundation remained committed to the clinic that desperately needed a new facility. Thus, with both the foundation and the clinic in need of new homes, CHRISTUS began a \$14 million building campaign to construct a new facility to house its office and the clinic, which would lease its space in the building for one dollar per year. The CHRISTUS Foundation president at the time, Les Cave, described the process. "As we were raising the money," he remembered, "we were meeting with architects and builders ... to start putting in place what the clinic was going to look like, how much space we needed,

how much space San José Clinic needed." After meticulous planning, the clinic moved into its new state-of-the-art facility at 2615 Fannin in 2010, enabling an expansion of services and elevating its reputation. Annually, the CHRISTUS Foundation for Healthcare donates over \$800,000 in in-kind contributions such as rent, utilities, and general building maintenance, and a member of the Sisters of Charity serves on the clinic's board of directors.¹⁴

Large Donors Working in Concert with In-kind Donations

Although the San José Clinic depends heavily on donations, it also relies on in-kind contributions from Houstonians and medical equipment and supply companies. Under this unique model, volunteers who offer their time and support, such as medical practitioners, provide a significant portion of the in-kind contributions. This allows donations to go toward general operating expenses rather than doctors' salaries. In 2019, the clinic's 684 volunteers donated 20,877 hours valued at \$694,522, and in-kind contributions totaled \$6.6 million. In 2020, even amid a global pandemic, in-kind services reached over \$5.1 million.¹⁵

In addition to the groups mentioned above that have served the clinic for eight decades or more – other local organizations have offered critical support. Houston Methodist Community Benefits, M.D. Anderson Foundation, the Strake Foundation, CHI St. Luke's Health Foundation, and others provide sums for general operating expenses, medical practitioners, the new satellite location, medical supplies, pharmaceuticals, lab work, and other needs. Much of the clinic's success is owed to the financial support, reinforcement, and advocacy of all these organizations. For nearly 100 years, the San José Clinic has dedicated its mission to caring for those with unfortunate circumstances. And to think, this journey began with a single idea and \$59. ◻

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Clinic director Sr. Teresa, with the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word, and Loy Sudhoff, chairman of the San José Clinic board, break ground for a new addition at the 301 Hamilton location in 1974.

Photo courtesy of the San José Clinic.