

Cardinal expresses 'disappointment' on proposed sale of St. Joseph Medical Center

By Catholic Review Staff

Cardinal Edwin F. O'Brien expressed disappointment March 23, after learning that the board of directors at St. Joseph Medical Center in Towson had recommended to Catholic Health Initiatives that the hospital transfer ownership to the University of Maryland Medical System.

"I was disappointed to learn of the decision to sell St. Joseph Medical Center to a non-Catholic ownership group given the high priority we place on maintaining the Catholic identity of our many institutions in the Archdiocese of Baltimore," Cardinal O'Brien said in a statement from the archdiocese.

"The hospital and its staff of outstanding doctors, nurses, physicians and other health care workers have a special connection to the Catholic community in the archdiocese, as well as to countless others, and I pray these ties will not be severed by today's decision."

According to a statement from St. Joseph Medical Center, the "transfer will need to be approved by Catholic Health Initiatives, federal, state and church authorities prior to the transaction closing."

The statement added that the U of M Medical System "has committed to honor SJMC's Catholic identity and its religious heritage."

"It is my hope and prayer," Cardinal O'Brien said, "that the future of the hospital will continue to reflect the values that have been the hallmark of St. Joseph's for nearly 150 years: reverence, integrity, compassion and excellence."

“Deeply disappointed though we are, I am confident that this archdiocese will do everything possible in the months and years ahead to make it so. ... St. Joseph’s, like all Catholic institutions that care for others, do so not because those they serve are Catholic, but because we are.”

According to the St. Joseph Medical Center statement, its proposal to leave the Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI) network “comes after a year-long evaluation of strategic alternatives and discussions in recent months with Catholic and other not-for-profit health care organizations that expressed interest in SJMC.”

St. Agnes Hospital in Baltimore was among the other health care organizations involved in those discussions.

According to financially strapped St. Joseph Medical Center, its board “recognized that as health care reform continues to evolve, it will be critical for health providers to be part of a regional network of coordinated health care organizations including hospitals, physicians, payers and other related health entities in geographically proximate areas.”

According to the St. Joseph Medical Center statement, it and the U of M Medical System “have agreed to enter into exclusive negotiations with the intent of signing a non-binding Letter of Intent to transfer ownership.”