



# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Wichita Children's Home to operate Gerard House teen maternity program**

Gerard House, established by Via Christi Health nearly three decades ago to provide residential maternity care to pregnant teens, has moved under the umbrella of the Wichita Children's Home, officials from both organizations announced today.

As part of this transition, Via Christi transferred ownership of Gerard House to the Wichita Children's Home.

"We're excited to see Gerard House secure its future by becoming part of an established organization that specializes in services for children," said Julie Jones, who has managed the program's day-to-day operations since May 2016. Via Christi and WCH have missions to serve the community's most vulnerable residents – and both have done so for more than 125 years, she added.

Debbie Kennedy, WCH chief executive officer, noted that the move will allow for the expansion of local services that are crucial for giving pregnant and parenting teens, and their babies, a healthy start.

"There is such a need for Gerard House, and it is a natural fit with the supportive and therapeutic programs already offered by the Wichita Children's Home," said Kennedy. "This move will enable teen moms to stay connected to the community support they need to become caring, self-sufficient adults with healthy, happy children."

Through its Moving Onto Motherhood, or MOM, program, WCH currently provides targeted case management, counseling and crisis intervention, parenting education, life skills development, academic support and other services for more than 50 pregnant and parenting youth.

As part of Gerard House's transition, all 13 of the maternity home's full- and part-time staff are being given the opportunity to remain with the program. Once appropriate zoning and licensing are in place, Gerard House will move to the 7,600-square-foot building currently housing St. Joseph Inn. It was built in 2000 and has 10 guest rooms, a large living room, quiet room, a kitchen and laundry facility. The new location will give the program room to grow while providing up to 10 residents with easier access to a full spectrum of pre-natal, labor and delivery and post-natal care and support services at Via Christi Hospital St. Joseph.

“The Children’s Home is being blessed with a compassionate and dedicated team to continue this program,” said Robyn Chadwick, vice president of operations for Via Christi’s Wichita hospitals. “They are Gerard House, not the building or its ownership.”

Sherry Hausmann, Via Christi’s regional hospital president, added that Via Christi’s collaboration with WCH will serve to further strengthen the relationship between the two non-profits, allowing both organizations to support young expectant mothers within the realm of their expertise.

“We believe this is only the first step in working together more closely to support the needs of children and teens in our community,” Hausmann said.

Rhonda Turner, WCH board president, said, “It’s exciting news. We are so happy to be able to carry on the great work of Gerard House.”

The Wichita Children’s Home, founded in 1888, offers the only emergency, temporary, residential care for children in our community. WCH is open 24/7 and every year serves more than 1,500 children and youth who have experienced abuse, neglect, abandonment, homelessness and exploitation. Supportive and therapeutic services include: emergency shelter, foster care, BRIDGES transitional living, street-based and drop-in center outreach programs, anti-trafficking crisis care, mentoring, life and job skills, and parenting education.

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#### **About Via Christi Health**

In Kansas, Ascension’s Via Christi Health operates nine hospitals and 75 other sites of care and employs more than 6,000 associates. Across the state, Via Christi provided more than \$77.8 million in community benefit and care of persons living in poverty in fiscal year 2016. Serving Kansas for more than 135 years, Ascension is a faith-based healthcare organization committed to delivering compassionate, personalized care to all, with special attention to persons living in poverty and those most vulnerable. Ascension is the largest non-profit health system in the U.S. and the world’s largest Catholic health system, operating 2,500 sites of care – including 141 hospitals and more than 30 senior living facilities – in 24 states and the District of Columbia. Visit [www.viachristi.org](http://www.viachristi.org)