

PREMIUM HEALTH CARE

Exclusive: Scott Morris will step down as Church Health CEO, successor named

By [Aisling Mäki](#), Daily Memphian

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Dr. Scott Morris talks with a nurse at Church Health Center. (Courtesy Church Health Center)

Dr. Scott Morris will step down as CEO of Church Health, the nonprofit he founded 36 years ago to provide affordable health care for uninsured and underserved Memphians.

Church Health's chief financial officer, Jennie Robbins, will take the helm starting July 1.

Morris will work collaboratively with Robbins during the transition period and continue to play a pivotal role within the organization, focusing on direct patient care and development initiatives.

Morris: Caring for the uninsured requires the whole health care system

"I'm not retiring; I'm going to just sort of move into a different role," he said.

Morris, a physician and Methodist minister, opened Church Health in 1987 as a clinic for the working poor inside a house on Peabody Avenue. The clinic saw 12 patients on its first day.

In 2017, Church Health moved to its current space in Crosstown Concourse, where it now logs more than 60,000 patient encounters annually as the largest faith-based, privately funded health clinic in the United States.

Morris has been highly visible as the face of the organization for decades.

"Too much has focused on me for a long time," he said.

His successor, Robbins, 51, previously worked in commercial lending with Bancorp South, Bank of

America and Regions National Bank in Memphis.

She came to Church Health in 2007 and has held several roles, including director of the Memphis Plan, the nonprofit's affordable health care plan for small businesses and self-employed individuals in lower-wage jobs.

Work begins on playscape at Crosstown Concourse

In her current role as chief financial officer, Robbins oversees the organization's growth, fiscal stability, financial systems, policies and procedures.

"Jennie is a charismatic figure, she's got a great sense of humor and she relates to people very quickly," Morris said. "I think people don't know her because as a chief financial officer she oftentimes stays in the background. But she's going to be a truly wonderful leader for us."



Jennie Robbins, formerly Church Health's chief financial officer, will take over as CEO starting July 1.
(Courtesy Church Health)

Robbins was selected as the nonprofit's CEO following a national search that eventually led back to her.

"For years, Scott has allowed me to



“Too much has focused on me for a long time,” said Church Health’s Dr. Scott Morris, who is stepping down as CEO but not retiring. (Courtesy Church Health)

operate in a CEO position with a good many initiatives, primarily around the financial space,” she said. “He has kind of groomed me to do this for a long time. And maybe we just had to go outside to make sure it was going to be the right choice.”

She’s poised to lead Church Health into its next phase of growth and innovation.

“I think my 17 years of experience and being entrenched in some of our systems and processes allows me to be able to ask questions a little bit differently,” she said.

Robbins said her first priority is to gain a comprehensive understanding of patient barriers to accessing primary care.

“I want to really understand where some of those gaps are so we can make sure that patients have access,” she said.

Robbins said she will continue to build upon the model that Morris, whom she calls “a visionary,” established.

“Our mission is not changing,” she said. “We are a faith-based, not-for-profit organization that specializes in primary health care. And we are called to do this

work. Memphis is called to help all of our people.”

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Aisling Mäki has spent the better part of two decades writing about Memphis. A former digital journalist for WMC Action News 5 and staff reporter for Memphis Daily News, her work has also appeared in The Commercial Appeal, High Ground News, I Love Memphis, Inside Memphis Business, The Memphis Flyer, Memphis Parent, Memphis Magazine and Tri-State Defender.
