

Bishop Sheen Housing

'Home Visitors' ... a Special Help

By CECELIA VIGGO

The title "home visitor" may evoke images of a veiled Florence Nightingale, or that Angel that spared the Jews at Passover, or the Avon Lady. Actually, the name refers to persons who have volunteered to help the Bishop Housing Foundation.

Mrs. Jerome Cook of the foundation explained that many of the families who are able to purchase homes through foundation help are not used to home ownership. They're a bit confused by mortgage and gas and electric statements, and aren't familiar with the complexities of negotiating with plumbers or heating contractors.

What these families need is a friendly adviser. This is the role of the home visitor who calls on a family frequently, and is available in times of trouble or emergency. Mrs. Cook makes it clear that a visitor is assigned only to families desirous of one, and that each visitor, or husband-and-wife visiting team, works with only one family.

Mrs. Cook says that the relationship established by the home visitor is basically one of friendship, not that of client and social worker, or benefactor and beneficiary.

That friendship is possible, she feels, because the home visitor usually begins to see the family only after they have moved to their own home. Thus, the family is in advantageous surroundings, not the conditions in which they previously lived.

Also, the home visitor and family aided by the foundation share common interests as home owners. Questions on home maintenance will arise naturally and Mrs. Cook says that this focuses the good will of the visitor on specific problems for which his advice may be both welcome and helpful.

What is a visit like? Mr. and Mrs. Nick Mastrodonato of St. John's of Rochester parish, began visits to "Mr. and Mrs. Brown", a couple with 10 children, on a strictly friendly basis. "I was expecting a baby, and Mrs. Brown was also," Mrs.

Mastrodonato said, "so we discussed that."

She commented that her husband related easily to Mr. Brown, and "was impressed that he wanted to do so much for his children."

The Mastrodonatos also admired Mr. and Mrs. Brown for their eagerness to improve themselves. Mrs. Mastrodonato recounted that on one visit, Mrs. Brown proudly displayed the shopping list she had written, the tangible result of many arduous hours spent teaching herself to read and write. Mrs. Brown learned enough to register to vote.

Mrs. Mastrodonato said that any suggestions offered were well-received. "Everything we said, they seemed to take seriously," she observed.

Other visitors have met with similar response. Mrs. Everett Murphy of St. Ambrose parish said she has found that "a great percentage of the poor hope to better themselves through their own efforts." She commented that she and her husband visited "Mr. and Mrs. Green" and their five children. They tried to communicate to the Greens the "responsibility-laden" role of the home owner.

The kind of assistance the Murphys were able to afford was of a very practical nature. For example, when the fuel supply ran low, "help" involved calling oil companies to find out which would fill the tank at midnight and accept a check.

But Mrs. Murphy asserted that the most important role of the home visitor is that of friend. For when a family is able to improve itself, and to move into a better neighborhood, old friendships are, of necessity, weakened, and new ones yet to be formed.

A friend was especially important to Mrs. Green, whose husband died only a few weeks after they moved into their new home. Mrs. Murphy was able to supply both sympathy and support to the widow and children.

Many of the home visitors stress that they also benefitted from the relationship. Miss Jean Protchenko of St. Philip Neri parish said, "I gained and enjoyed it as much or more than they."



Mrs. Jerome C. Cook, right, of the Bishop Sheen Housing Foundation, pays a Christmas visit to some of the 12-member Ceal Johnson family which, with financial help from the foundation, was able to move from a small house on Hand Street in Rochester's inner city and to purchase a larger home on Third Street.

In her visits to "Mrs. White," Miss Protchenko developed a special closeness to the "White" children. She took them downtown during the holidays and on their birthdays, and tutored them in reading and math.

Mrs. Richard Chapel of Webster Presbyterian Church mentioned another facet of home visiting. She and her husband, as do many other home visitors, take their children along on visits.

Presence of children has two effects: it establishes a common bond between the families and enables the children from both families to meet persons with different backgrounds.

Another home visitor seemed to sum up the logic behind home visitation when she reflected that "visitation made those helped by the housing foundation feel that this was a sincere organization."

The poor constantly face a barrage of forms, titles and

"professional persons." Certainly, large organizations accomplish much good, but sometimes even being helped can be disheartening when assistance seems cold.

Sincere has come to mean "from the heart", and the home visitor from the housing foundation becomes a very real personal link between the complex machinery behind financing a down payment on a home, and the unique individuals who will live in it.

SPECIAL FEATURE MONDAY, JAN. 4th Thru SUNDAY, JAN. 10th LOBSTER TAILS

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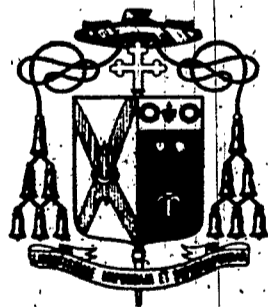
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Diocesan Appointments



Father Ralph J. Fraats, to be assistant pastor of Holy Rosary Church, on loan from the Archdiocese of Washington.

Father Lawrence A. Gross, to be chaplain of Bishop Kearney High School, from assistant pastor of Holy Name of Jesus Church, Greece.

Father Robert W. Hammond, to be assistant pastor of St. Michael's Church, Newark, from Holy Trinity, Church, Webster.

Father Robert A. Magin has resigned from the priesthood as of Jan. 1.

Father Leo Misiuda, to be assistant pastor of St. Stanislaus' Church, from Poland.

Father George Wiant, to the Secular Mission for Wayne County in the Office of Human Development, from chaplain of Bishop Kearney High School.