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Ministry of Justice and Mercy Diocesans Help Prisoners and Those Freed from Prison

(Second in a two-part series)
By John Dash

Rogers House is unique in several respects.

It is a parish ministry, providing a service one would ordinarily associate with a much larger institution. It is run by laymen with the "enablement" of the pastor. And it is developing at quite a clip.

Rogers House is the three-year-old effort of Corpus Christi Parish to provide ex-convicts with a residence, with an opportunity to examine their lives and change their attitudes, and to learn skills useful for entry into the regular business world.

Diocesans are active in two relatively new and very different ministries to the imprisoned and their families and to those who have been released from penal institutions.

The Church has long had formal ministries to the jailed, principally through its chaplains. This account, however, deals with, first, an ecumenical organization which visits those awaiting trial and advocates on their behalf, and second, a parish organization which helps ex-offenders find skills and readjustment to life outside prison.

According to Jim Smith, director of Rogers House, the parish considers the Breck Street residence its "intensive care unit." It is there, according to a backgrounder Smith penned, that within the community of the house and church that men have the

opportunity to turn their lives over to God and His team so that they might continue to live. It is here that they choose between life and death.

The men in the program, Smith said in a recent interview, are not, however,

pressured into making a Christian commitment. Practicing Muslims, he explained, would be encouraged in their faith tradition, for example.

The Rogers House program is also expanding, and shortly the residents will open a restaurant and bakery, and perhaps a bookshop, at 271 Central Park.

The property is the former building for Lanovera Pastry and Frozen Dessert.

According to Smith, the parish raised \$37,000 and bought the building last February. Since that time, donations and the services of volunteer workers and Rogers House residents are being combined to renovate the three-story structure.

Last week, a visitor to the site could see Frank Staropoli, the former director of the diocesan Family Life Office, seated in a tee shirt and work pants, haggling by phone with a City construction permit officer.

Staropoli, who earlier would confide to friends that after he left his diocesan job, he had "no idea what I'll be doing," has assumed the role of project manager for the renovation.

The building is now gutted,
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Jim Smith, director of Rogers House, in front of the proposed restaurant.

Mercy Center Educates, Advocates for Elderly

By Terrance J. Brennan

"Medically, we can help people live longer, but we haven't come up with a way to help them cope with living longer," said Sister Anne Maloy, RSM, director of the Mercy Center with the Aging.

Sister Anne said the center's aim is to help parishes and churches in assessing, evaluating and implementing services to the elderly, best described as "educating and advocating for the rights of human beings."

The program began in 1983, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy and the Diocese of Rochester. Sister Anne has also been appointed to the State Bishops' Commission on the Elderly. Assisting Sister Anne is Sister M. Gratia L'Esperance, also a Sister of Mercy.

"There is a very high percentage of elderly living locally," Sister Anne said, "and the health services offered today are often so confusing that the aging need counseling to get them by."

According to Sister Anne, Monroe County is second only to St. Petersburg, Fla., in population per capita over the age of 60.

"The elderly need information on Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security, among other things, and it's important that they receive it because they have to deal with these things every day," Sister Anne said. "Quite often, for the aged, filling out various forms is too difficult a task without assistance."

The center sponsored a recent four-week family education program on aging at St. Andrew's Parish which exposed the needs of the parish's elderly and the desire for the following:

- An area directory of services for senior citizens.
- Continuing education for elderly.
- A support group for care-givers (those who care for the frail elderly).
- A transportation system for getting elderly to church

on Sunday, medical appointments, etc.

Often overlooked in considering the elderly, said Sister Anne, is the strain that the "care-giver" lives under while nursing elderly that cannot manage for themselves.

"Care-givers need to see that other people are going through the same things, the same frustrations as they are," said Sister Judy Morgan, pastoral assistant at St. Andrew's.

Also, by working through the church network to expose awareness to the plight of the elderly, Sister Anne feels a "natural connection" has been made to reach into many homes.

The center is also planning a program, to begin in September, with Southwest Ecumenical Ministries (19th Ward). Statistics accumulated in January this year, as part of the Southwest Human Services Planning Group Needs Assessment,

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Sisters Anne and Gratia L'Esperance, center, discuss programs for the elderly with parish committee members at St. Andrew's Church.

Pope John Paul II: Birth Control Decisions Are 'Judgments before God'

By John Thavis

Vatican City (NC) — Responsible decisions on family size require a "judgment before God" based on the teachings of the Church, Pope John Paul II said Aug. 1.

When it comes to limiting the size of families, couples must use criteria clearly stated in Church teachings, the pope told several thousand people at a weekly general audience in St. Peter's Square.

"Members of the Church cannot use methods of birth control which are disapproved of by the Church's teaching authority," the pope said, quoting from the Second Vatican Council's document "Gaudium et Spes" (Joy and Hope), Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World.

In his fourth in a series of about 12 planned talks on married love and birth control, the pope based his remarks on Pope Paul VI's 1968 encyclical "Humanae Vitae" (Of Human Life) and the conciliar document.

"The council document reminds us that when it is a question of harmonizing married love with the responsible transmission of life, it is not enough to take into account one's own good intentions and motivations," the pope said.

"Objective criteria must be used," he said, criteria drawn from the nature of the person and human action, which respect the sense of self-giving and procreation in the context of true love.

Responsible parenthood means considering the physical, psychological, economic and social conditions of the individual or family in the decision to have children, he said.

"However, married people are called to realize that in their consideration of all these factors they must arrive at a judgment before God," he said. "In their behavior they must be ruled by conscience, that is, they must make their decisions in the light of the teaching authority of the Church, which is the authentic interpreter of divine law."

The Church, in "Humanae Vitae," rejected the use of artificial means of birth control.

Church officials have approved and promoted natural family planning methods as an effective, permissible means of birth regulation. Those methods use a number of techniques to determine a woman's natural fertility cycle, and rely on abstinence during the fertile period rather than artificial suppression of fertility or artificial barriers to contraception.

The pope noted that "Humanae Vitae" treats responsible parenthood in a complete sense, without "reducing it to one of its partial aspects, as do those who speak exclusively of birth control."

The encyclical, he said, considers the necessity of knowing and respecting biological laws, the dominion of reason and will over tendencies of instinct or passion, and the many personal and social conditions that influence the decision either to have a large family or to avoid a new birth.

In previous weeks, a Vatican theologian, Msgr. Carlo Caffarra, had briefed journalists on the content of the papal talks. Msgr. Caffarra said it was the pope's idea to have a theologian present at each of the weekly talks, which will end a series of discourses on married love that has lasted several years.