

Catholic action

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tory Seminary, invited Dorothy Day to Rochester to deliver a public lecture. A large, idealistic crowd attended, made up extensively of students from St. Andrew's Seminary, Aquinas Institute and Nazareth College. Soon a local Catholic Worker group was organized and began, under Father George C. Vogt, to study the papal social encyclicals. When Day returned for a second talk in February of 1935, she recommended that the Rochester group open a house of hospitality comparable to the one she and Peter had started in New York City: a hospice where the only question asked was, "Are you in need?"

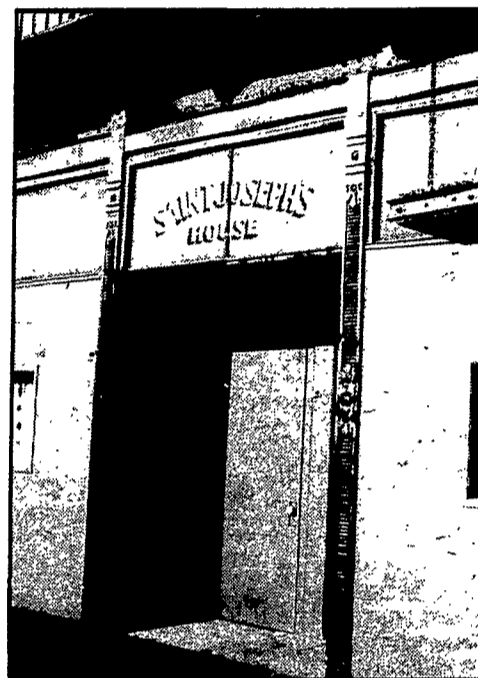
By 1938 the Rochester Catholic Workers were ready to follow through. They first borrowed the facilities of the Peter Claver Center at 13 Rome St. (where Father George A. Weinmann had opened a social hall for local Blacks). So many of the depression-ridden welcomed their "coffee-and-doughnut" evenings that the RCW soon moved to larger quarters: first to an empty store on North Clinton; then to an abandoned Episcopal church hall on Almira Street; and finally, to their present downtown building at 402 South Avenue: St. Joseph's House of Hospitality. The Catholic "workers" had meanwhile incorporated on March 18, 1941, as a non-profit religious organization.

It is difficult to compile a full list of the activities of St. Joseph's House since its establishment. As a lay Catholic enterprise it has served as a center for the liturgical apostolate; for interracial action; for legal advocacy; for pro-peace campaigns: in other words, for the varying necessities of the hour. Not all the Rochester collaborators have agreed with Dorothy Day's parti-



File photo

inspired by the example and encouragement of Dorothy Day, co-founder of the Catholic Worker Movement, Catholic Workers in the Rochester area decided to open a hospice of their own. Beginning in borrowed facilities in 1938, the workers began offering coffee-and-doughnut evenings for those placed in jeopardy by the Great Depression. After several moves, the Catholic Workers finally established a permanent hospice at 402 South Ave. and named it St. Joseph's House of Hospitality. The center offers a full range of activities, but its main emphasis has always been to feed the hungry, clothe the naked and give shelter to the roofless. Bishop Fulton J. Sheen is shown talking with several of the house's guests in the above photo, taken in the late 1960s.



cular opinions, especially regarding pacifism. But all have concurred on the continuing obligation to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and give shelter to the roofless. These practical charities still appeal to the many generous Rochesterians who personally volunteer to become what Dorothy Day called "ambassadors of Christ."

The Rochester Catholic Worker movement has also served to inspire other "personalist" undertakings. We see that inspiration at work, I think, in several parishes' efforts to resettle immigrants, especially, in recent years, those from Southeast Asia. We see it perhaps even more clearly in several "spin-off" inner-city hostels, of which the most recent are Bethany House for homeless mothers and children (1977) and the Sisters of Mercy's Melita House for pregnant women (1980).

The accomplishments of the Rochester Catholic Worker movement and its volunteerist "satellites" deserve fuller attention than space now permits. The whole story is a remarkable one.

St. Joseph's House of Hospitality meanwhile continues its basic works of mercy. Today it serves a hot meal each noon to guests ranging in number from 80 to 130; it provides clothing and, in winter, temporary sleeping quarters; and it helps the poor however else it can. Of the 60 CW houses erected throughout the United States, the Rochester hospice is now the second oldest. The oldest, of course, is the original St. Joseph House in New York.

Therefore, the fifth decade of the *Catholic Courier* spanned the grim years of the Great Depression. Yet out of the poverty of that era sprang these two enduring remedial movements, both of them lay-motivated and lay-conducted. Truly, they were flowers sprouting up through the ashes!



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