

Agency plans facility to serve male addicts

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Catholic Family Center's Restart Substance Abuse Services is currently exploring potential sites at which to locate Freedom House, a 20-bed residential facility for the substance-abuse treatment of low-income males.

Last month, the center received grant funds totaling \$250,000 for Freedom House. The New York State Division of Substance Abuse Services will provide \$200,000 for the project, with the remaining \$50,000 coming from the Monroe County Department of Community Services, according to Catherine Saresky, associate director for Restart's clinical services.

Saresky said the monies would be used for the new program's start-up costs, which include building rental, operating expenses and staffing. The Catholic Family Center must find additional monies for building renovation and any needed equipment for the program, she added.

Freedom House's programs will be similar to those that can be found at Liberty Manor, Restart's residential treatment center for as many as 15 low-income women and five preschool-age children. Liberty Manor provides individual and group counseling for addicted women, in addition to informational and educational services.

Saresky said that Freedom House will be the first treatment facility of its kind in the Rochester area, and noted that the Catholic Family Center has been advocating such a new program for almost a decade.

"There's never been an adequate residence for (low-income) men with drug problems," she said. "Many of our clients ... have limited resources or no resources. They didn't have access to an inpatient program."

Clients will be referred to Freedom House by the Department of Social Services, health-care providers, human-services agencies, the criminal-justice system and other treatment programs for substance abuse.

Saresky pointed out that Freedom

House's purpose is to remove drug addicts from environments often populated by fellow drug-users — environments that serve to encourage an addict's decline. Many of Freedom House's potential clients will have spent 15-20 years addicted to such drugs as cocaine and need intensive help if they are to overcome their addiction, she said.

Among other services, the facility's staff will help clients develop social and recreational skills that will lead them away from the drug-oriented lifestyle, Saresky said. Drug addicts often don't know how to use unstructured time in a constructive manner, she said, observing that such activities as bowling on a weekend night or going to a museum on an afternoon are often alien experiences for hard-core addicts.

"Many of these clients have never been exposed to these things," Saresky said, adding that many clients have also not enjoyed the benefits of a complete education. "Oftentimes, a significant percentage of our clients come in who have not completed a (high school) diploma," she said, noting that Freedom House will assist clients in obtaining a high school equivalency diploma.

The associate director declined to list properties being considered as potential sites for Freedom House, but said that a location would be chosen soon.



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer
CELEBRATING FREEDOM — A Feb. 17 service celebrating Nelson Mandela's release from prison drew several hundred people to Rochester's Asbury First United Methodist Church. The event — sponsored by the R. Nelson Mandela Scholarship Committee at SUNY Brockport along with Metro Act, Hillel, the Committee for Justice in Southern Africa and others — featured speakers, music and a motorcade down East Avenue. Above (from left), Dia Lawrence, Thandi Emdon and Jennifer Hyman sing the South African National Anthem. At right, M. Vernon Molefe, chairman of the scholarship fund, reflects on speakers' comments.



Mercy congregations to form institute

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — The Sisters of Mercy of the Americas are working to create an institute that will unite the order's 17 independent congregations — including the Rochester-based Mercy sisters — under one governing structure.

Last month, the Vatican's Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life approved the Mercy sisters' request to form the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas.

Since 1965, the nation's Mercy congregations have been loosely federated, but starting in 1980, the congregations began exploring ways of formalizing their relationship under a permanent governing structure.

The congregations wanted to unite in order to integrate their ministries and speak with one voice on issues related to the Mercy sisters' work, according to a statement released by the major superior of the Rochester congregation.

"(The institute) will make a stronger single voice speaking out for the poor, sick and ignorant of our time in the spirit of our foundress Catherine McAuley," said the statement from Sister Ann Miller. "The new institute will give new vitality to the Mercy charism of compassion to the church and the world."

In September, 1988, 94 percent of the Rochester sisters voted to join the institute, Sister Miller told the *Catholic Courier*, noting that approval by a minimum of 80 percent of each congregation's membership was required in order to join the institute.

Sister Miller's congregation claims 247 members out of a national total of approximately 7,700. Of that number, about 500 Mercy sisters work in Central and South America, the Caribbean, Guam and the Philippines, according to Sister Judith Carle, a member of the Mercy Transition Administrative Group in Silver Spring, Md. The three-member transition group is coordinating the congregations' move to unify.

Sister Miller also noted that the Sisters of Mercy have experienced a decline in membership in recent years and, with fewer sisters belonging to each congregation, it was important for the congregations to unite in order to strengthen one another.

"We found that loose association no longer had the impact we wanted," Sister Miller said. "Each group had fewer numbers."

For example, the Mercy sisters hope that uniting their numbers will give them more impact on issues related to their experiences working in Central America, Sister Carle noted in a phone interview. She

speculated that once the institute has completely formed, the Sisters of Mercy could speak with one voice in opposition to U.S. aid to El Salvador's rightist government, which is currently locked in a bloody civil war with leftist insurgents. In the past, Sister Carle commented, individual congregations took such stands independently.

Before the institute can be formed, the Vatican has asked the Mercy sisters to draw up a constitution and examine what the congregations can do together financially, Sister Miller said. For example, she remarked that the institute might look into a program of health-insurance benefits for Mercy sisters.

The institute's first general chapter meeting is tentatively slated for summer of 1991. Coinciding with the chapter meeting will be the dissolution of the Sisters of the Mercy of the Union. This organization represents almost half the Mercy sisters in the Americas, Sister Carle noted, adding that the union is considered to be one congregation.

Next year, the union will divide into the nine separate communities it currently represents and, from then on, the institute will consist of 25 communities of Mercy sisters, as opposed to the current configuration of 17 congregations in the federation.

A five-member delegation, including the superior of each community, will represent each community at the institute's chapter meeting, Sister Carle said. At that time, the delegates will elect the institute's leaders and officers, she said.

Currently, the transition group is looking to rent office space for the institute in the Silver Spring area, Sister Carle said. Since last September, Mercy sisters have been gathering for "visioning" meetings throughout the country where they swap ideas about the future role of the institute, she added.

According to Sister Carle, three of the 17 Mercy congregations in the United States have yet to make final plans for joining the institute.

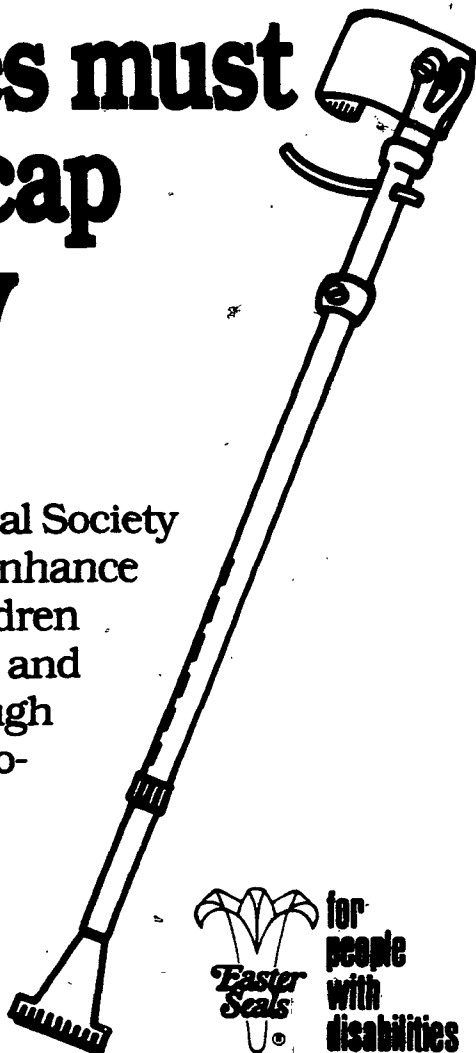
Although she declined to identify those three congregations, she said that in one congregation's case the delay was needed

Continued on page 15

Catholic Courier

Disabilities must not handicap the quality of life

The goal of the Easter Seal Society of Monroe County is to enhance the quality of life for children and adults with physical and mental disabilities through support of a balanced program of medical, recreational, social and educational services.



Space donated to the Ad Council as a public service of Catholic Courier.