



Every Saturday evening, Father Anthony P. Mugavero (far right) of Rochester's St. Bridget Church celebrates Mass at the House of Mercy, 725 Hudson Ave. During a Dec. 10 service guests and volunteers of the inner-city outreach center joined hands in praise.

## House's new home means a merrier Christmas

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Earlier this week, the House of Mercy, an outreach center serving the poor and homeless, began distributing donated toys to 1,400 families on public assistance.

Many such families are unable to afford new Christmas toys for their children, noted Charles W. Earlsley, the agency's coordinator.

"We feel like one time a year, a kid should get a new toy under the tree," he said. "It kind of keeps the gleam of Santa in their eyes."

Keeping a gleam of hope in the eyes of the marginalized throughout the year forms the basis of the mission at the House of Mercy, now located at 725 Hudson Ave.

Twice as many people are visiting the House of Mercy since the agency moved from its former location at 102 Central Park, according to Earlsley, who lives part-time at the house. As he walked through the ministry's spacious new location, a building once owned by Rochester Gas & Electric Corporation, Earlsley noted that 4,000 people use the center's services monthly, compared to 2,000 at the former site.

"I do miss it," Earlsley said of the old location. "But we're far better situated here."

Operated by the Sisters of Mercy of

Rochester, the House of Mercy moved from its former location on Central Park last summer, and officially opened at the new site on Aug. 18, he said.

The Sisters of Mercy had cited the old building's cramped quarters coupled with the growing affluence of the surrounding neighborhood as the reasons behind their move. The house's traditional low-income clientele was moving out of the neighborhood, and Earlsley added that the house moved in order to reach the homeless and poor population it was intended to serve.

After the sisters acquired the new building — which was owned by the federal government through the City of Rochester — they had the 6,000-square-foot building renovated for about \$120,000, Earlsley said.

The new site features a lounge, kitchen, dining room, conference/education room, several offices, and a donated clothing room and laundry room

in the basement.

With twice as much space as the former venue, the new building enables the House of Mercy's staff to deliver better services to the poor, Earlsley explained. For example, in the old house's confined quarters, volunteers were only able to distribute 50 food packages a day, he said. Now, volunteers can distribute three times that number at any time, he reported.

Earlsley acknowledged that some Hudson Avenue-area residents were initially apprehensive about the House of Mercy moving into their neighborhood. In an attempt to assuage any fears of the agency's new neighbors, Earlsley started a Saturday morning breakfast which originally drew about 30 people. Now, it is common to see more than 100 area residents show up for the breakfast, he added.

"The kids love it," he commented.

This Christmas, between 200 and 250 people are expected to show up for the house's Christmas dinner, he said, noting that volunteers from parishes in Spencerport and Pittsford help prepare the meal.

*We feel like one time a year, a kid should get a new toy under the tree*

Charles W. Earlsley

Several diocesan parishes and other church-related groups send volunteers on a regular basis to help the house's core group of 27 volunteers assist Earlsley and the three Sisters of Mercy who run the building.

In addition to the volunteers and staff, a local priest celebrates Mass every Saturday evening and another area priest provides pastoral counseling.

The House of Mercy also regularly offers the services of a nurse who can assess both the physical and mental needs of the clients, and refers them to physicians or psychiatrists if necessary.

In addition to these services, the House of Mercy also offers the following:

- Packaged foods, furniture and personal hygiene products to the homeless and poor.
- Assistance in finding people places to live and in getting services from state and local agencies.
- Employment-seeking assistance.
- Education in such areas as budgeting, literacy, time-telling, time management and scheduling, phone skills, typing and computer literacy.
- Transitional counseling for ex-offenders.

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EDITORS' NOTE: To learn more about the House of Mercy, call 716/266-2580. Checks made payable to "House of Mercy" may be sent to: House of Mercy, 725 Hudson Ave., Rochester, N.Y. 14621.

**Merry Christmas!**

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