

DIOCESAN NEWS

Housing ministries may unite to aid families

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Melita House, a ministry for single pregnant women, and Catherine McAuley Housing, a ministry for single mothers and their children, are tentatively slated to form as one ministry sometime in May, according to the directors of both ministries.

If they form as one ministry, the two projects of the Sisters of Mercy would combine three sites under one organization: Melita House, 124 Evergreen St.; The Catherine McAuley Housing Project, 1694 St. Paul St.; and "Judith House," the probable name for a new ministry for single mothers and their children that will be located in a two-story house at 588 Child St.

The Child Street house, built in 1901, was donated to the Sisters of Mercy last year by "friends" of the order who wish to remain anonymous, said Sister Janet Korn, RSM, director of McAuley Housing. It is currently being renovated and is slated to house its first family by April, she said.

Michele Hannagan, director of Melita House, said the two projects decided to consolidate their efforts in order to better support single mothers and their families.

"We've found that the things that make a difference in the lives of the women and the children is the continuing support," she said.

Combining both organizations' resources would enable the ministries to follow women from their pregnancies all the way through to their attainment of financial stability, she and Sister Korn said.

Pending legal approval, the new Child Street home could possibly hold two apartments, and might be named for Sister Judith Heberle, RSM, who died last July, Sister Korn said. In addition to the many leadership roles she held with her congregation, Sister Judith played a key role in establishing Melita House, Sister Korn noted.

Generally, teens between ages 16 and 18 who are preg-



Matthew Scott/Staff photographer

Sister Janet Korn, RSM, stands in front of a house donated to the Sisters of Mercy. The house will provide housing for single mothers and their children.

nant stay at Melita House for three to four months, Hannagan said. Then, if there are openings at Catherine McAuley Housing, the mothers and their children can live

there where they are provided low-rent apartments, support groups, job training, and education, Sister Korn said. She explained that "Judith House" on Child Street will serve as the last home for the mothers and their children before they strike out on their own.

"I think this gives us the final steppingstone for the women as they become economically independent," she said.

Since the Sisters of Mercy issued a call last fall for community support of the new ministry project, the Child Street home has received an outpouring of volunteer help and donations, Sister Korn said.

For example, last November, the William G. McGowan Charitable Foundation, based in Washington, D.C., gave the new house a grant for \$57,960, she said. The grant is being used for renovation costs, and to establish programs for the women and their families, she said.

Paul Gardner, project manager for LeCesse Construction Company in Rochester, said his company put together renovation plans for the house and has been managing the project.

"We're very enthusiastic about Sister Janet's work and her new project," Gardner said.

Sister Korn added that most of the labor to renovate the house has been donated by several individual volunteers along with such groups as the Men's Group of Church of the Transfiguration in Pittsford, and Local 86 of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers.

"We're Catholics, and we're helping the church," said Paul Yatteau.

Yatteau is a retired electrician with Local 86 who is working on the home and who attends Guardian Angels Church.

Art Salvione, a fellow retired colleague from the local and a member of Our Lady Queen of Peace Church, echoed Yatteau's comments. But he also said they had a more practical incentive to help.

"We like to keep busy," he said.

'Spirit Outside' seeks to share faith with former prisoners

By Kathleen Schwar
Staff writer

After two years of taking their Bibles and their faith inside the Yates County Jail, some volunteers "want out."

Parishioners from St. Michael's Church, Penn Yan, have helped run The Spirit Inside ministry, which ventures into the jail for faith sharing with inmates. Now some are helping to create The Spirit Outside — a similar program, but one intended to work with former inmates outside the jail. Sessions for the new program will take place weekly at a community center in town.

"What we've discovered is that inmates struggle with three problems: alcohol, drugs and violence," said Father Charles Mulligan, co-pastor of St. Michael's Church. "While they're in jail they are super-focused on God renewing their lives. When they're out of jail, that focus gets trashed...."

And most churches don't welcome ex-inmates, noted Doris Pace, a volunteer who helped expand the ministry to include female inmates.

"So many men are from Yates County and when they are released, they very often are very dedicated to Christ and certainly have every intention of doing the

right thing," she said, "but when they get out and there is nobody to be with them but their old pals, they fall back in their old ways."

St. Michael's and the First Presbyterian Church in Penn Yan jointly run The Spirit Inside, and are recruiting volunteers from other churches for the new ministry outside of jail. Father Mulligan plans to address the local Episcopal church in March.

The current program has about 15 volunteers, and together the programs will need at least 20, he said. Some will work with both programs. Two former inmates have already volunteered.

Volunteers need a "willingness to listen, a willingness to testify from their own experience and a willingness to share your own life without pretending," Father Mulligan said. "We are not there to preach."

Rather, he explained, they bring their own struggles and help others discern how the Gospel applies to their own lives. Sessions last 1½ to two hours each week, and volunteers rotate the assignments.

Certain ground rules apply:

- "We don't bring Jesus in here. Jesus is already here," Father Mulligan said.
- "The Spirit can speak through any one of us," he continued.
- Everything in the session is kept confidential.

Participants must respect each other. Each volunteer receives a mailing with the upcoming Sunday Gospel reading, a question to begin discussion and a list of people with whom to meet.

"I never ask what they're in there for," Pace said. "Because I don't want to embarrass them and I really don't care. I know what they're in there for. They're in because they're awfully unhappy."

And they've tried in vain to rid themselves of that unhappiness, she added.

A Consistent Life Ethic grant will be used to train volunteers through the Alternatives to Violence Project in Penn Yan in March, before the weekly faith-sharing begins in April. AVP is a spiritually-based but nondenominational program presented throughout the country and overseas.

Vicki Cooley of Dundee, a Quaker who will facilitate the AVP sessions, explained they are "intense community-building experiential workshops" that offer a process for working through underlying causes of violence such as fear and anger. They focus on building self-affirmation and such

skills as communication, cooperation and conflict resolution.

The grant also may fund similar training in Newark with Wayne County Jail volunteers, and a follow-up session in Yates County for volunteers and former inmates.

The training will help strengthen participants' coping skills, Father Mulligan noted.

"It will help all of us deal with violence, rush and stress, and find alternative ways of dealing with anger and frustration — what people in jail notably fail at," the priest said.

It is important to reach people at the county jail level, he said, noting many state prisoners had been in and out of county jails. He explained he'd modeled The Spirit Inside on the success of small Christian communities he'd seen while serving from 1985 to 1993 in Chile.

As for The Spirit Outside, he said, "If we get it going, that's success. If it works, that's success."

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