

DIOCESAN NEWS

Habitat founder rallies volunteers with speech

By Rob Cullivan
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In the Gospel according to Millard Fuller — founder of Habitat for Humanity International — there is only one true moral transgression.

"If you don't have a Habitat for Humanity bumper sticker on your car, you're living in sin," he told 700 people, who responded with laughter, April 11 in Asbury First United Methodist Church, 1050 East Ave.

Founded in Americus, Ga., in 1976, Habitat uses donations and volunteer labor to build homes for low-income families who must contribute labor to the home's building and pay no-interest mortgages.

Fuller was in town to serve as keynote speaker for the Habitat's Northeast Regional Conference April 11-12 at Asbury.

Saturday's portion of the conference, consisting of training sessions and workshops, drew 300 people from New York and New England, according to Arthur Woodward, executive director of Flower City Habitat for Humanity, based in Rochester.

Flower City has built 66 houses in Rochester, including two of the 100 Habitat homes in the nation built solely by women, Woodward added. He also pointed out that St. Joseph's Parish in Penfield and St. Louis Parish in Pittsford both sponsored and built Habitat homes in the last year. St. Joseph's is participating in an ecumenical effort with several other Penfield churches this year



Kerry Huller/Photo intern
Millard Fuller, founder of Habitat for Humanity, stops at the Habitat house sponsored by St. Joseph's Parish, Penfield, during a visit to Rochester April 11.

building another home, he added.

Other diocesan parishes that have participated in Habitat projects include the Catholic Communities of St. Anne's in Palmyra and St. Gregory's in Marion, and St. Mary's of the Lake Church in Ontario, according to an official with Habitat for Humanity of Wayne County.

And Fuller's appearance in Rochester came on the heels of an announcement by St. Theodore's Parish in Gates that it would co-sponsor the building of a Habitat home

along with Third Presbyterian Church in Rochester.

Fuller's Asbury speech was like a sermon as he rallied the faithful to end substandard housing for the poor. Frequently alluding to, and quoting from Scripture, Fuller called on his audience to dream of a world where no one was compelled to live in shabby quarters.

"God has called us to no little task," he said. "God has called us to a big ministry."

Fuller pointed out that Habitat already had a remarkable success record that boded well for its future. In its first 10 years, Habitat built 1,000 homes, and its second decade, 49,000 homes, he said.

"We now expect to build the next 50,000 houses in the next three years," he said.

One of those houses will be built by St.

Theodore's parishioners. According to Richard Cringoli, a parish council member who attended Fuller's speech, the parish council voted unanimously on March 11 to participate in a Habitat project. He added that the vote culminated months of informal research by council members into what type of social service project parishioners would support.

He also said St. Theodore's would begin calling for volunteers for the project April 19-20. He added that the parish wants to raise \$25,000 for the \$50,000 home. Third Presbyterian will cover the other half of the home's cost, he said.

Cringoli said Fuller's emotional words moved him to commit more fully than he already had to St. Theodore's Habitat project.

"He said some things that you don't consider immediately," Cringoli remarked of Fuller. "I hadn't taken it back to Christ as the carpenter."

Indeed, Fuller emphasized that Jesus's career as a carpenter was fitting inspiration for Habitat volunteers. The fact that so many Christians of different faiths have helped Habitat build homes is testament to a "theology of the hammer" to which all can subscribe, he said.

"We can agree on the tool of Jesus," Fuller said. "The tool he used as a boy, as a carpenter. The tool used to nail him to the cross."

In addition to Fuller's speech, the April 11 event featured a brief speech by Australia Blake, a local Habitat homeowner, who preceded Fuller. Choking with emotion, Blake thanked the audience for supporting Habitat's work.

"Don't stop doing what you're doing," she said. "There's a lot of us out there, and we do appreciate what you're doing."

Obituary

Sister Mary Cornelia O'Brien, 78

Sister Mary Cornelia O'Brien, RSM, who served for 33 years as a nurse and 60 years as a Sister of Mercy, died March 15, 1997, after a battle with cancer. She was 78.

An Elmira native, Sister O'Brien was the daughter of the late John Joseph and Marie (Kane) O'Brien. After graduating from Elmira Free Academy in 1936, she entered the Sisters of Mercy. She professed her perpetual vows in August 1942.

Sister O'Brien taught kindergarten at St. Ann's School, Hornell, before beginning nurse's training at St. James Mercy Hospital, Hornell. She served as a nurse at St. James Mercy from 1940 to 1967. She also served as a nurse at Mercy High School, Rochester (1967-69), and at the Mercy motherhouse infirmary (1969-70, 1976-77).

In 1970, Sister O'Brien was part of the

core group that opened the House of Prayer in Corning, and served with that ministry from 1970 to 1976. Beginning in 1977, she was a parish minister/visitor at St. Patrick's Parish, Owego. She retired to the motherhouse in 1996.

In addition to her parents, Sister O'Brien was predeceased by two brothers, Thomas and Richard. She is survived by brothers and sister-in-law J. William and Jacquelyn, and Robert; many nieces and nephews; and the members of the Sisters of Mercy.

The funeral Mass for Sister O'Brien was celebrated March 18 in the motherhouse chapel. Interment was at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery.

Memorials in Sister O'Brien's name may be made to the Sisters of Mercy, 1437 Blossom Road, Rochester, N.Y. 14610.

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