

# DIOCESAN NEWS

## Sanctuary House will offer shelter

By Rob Cullivan  
Staff writer

ROCHESTER — In response to the increasing numbers of homeless women and children seeking shelter, Catholic Family Center plans to open a new facility called Sanctuary House in May 2002 that will offer 16 rooms, and that will be the first shelter in the city fully accessible to people with physical disabilities.

CFC held a symbolic groundbreaking ceremony Dec. 3 at the Centers at High Falls. Carolyn Portanova, CFC's president and chief executive officer, noted the agency does not reveal the location of its women's shelters for security reasons. CFC operates another shelter, Women's Place, an 18-room facility for women and children, as well as the Francis Center, a 36-bed facility for men.

Bishop Matthew H. Clark gave a blessing at the ceremony, which was also attended by representatives of the city, Monroe County and New York State. Each of the dignitaries and guests laid one brick to create a symbolic foundation. Each brick was inscribed with such words as "love" or "hope."

Susan Bennett, CFC's director of Homeless and Housing Services, told the *Catholic Courier* that Sanctuary Place was needed to accommodate the overwhelming demand for shelter in the city.

"When it opens, it's going to be full," she said. "But it's going to alleviate some of the overcrowding (at Women's Place)."

She noted that Women's Place turns away between three and seven women a week. She attributed the increase in demand for shelter to factors including the lack of affordable housing for poor people in the city; substance abuse effects on women's lives; domestic violence; and the economic downturn of the last year.

The new shelter is costing \$1 million to establish, and is primarily funded by federal, state, county and city monies, Bennett said. She added that United Way of Greater Rochester Inc. also provided funds and loan assistance, and that churches and private donors gave \$135,000. Among its many features, the shelter will have an elevator and a ramp for people with disabilities, and will feature a "quiet" room where guests may meditate. Bennett said that like Women's Place, the new shelter will offer meals, laundry facilities, individual case management, counseling and access to other agencies' services.

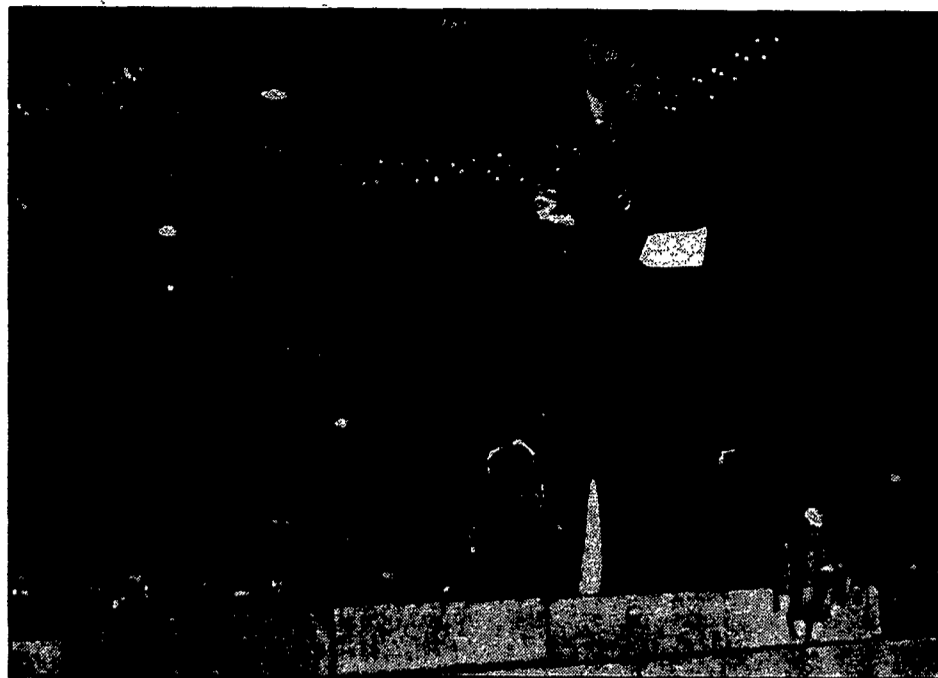
On average, she said, a guest of Women's Place stays about two weeks

### TGA donations welcomed

Pledges made through Dec. 10 to the Diocese of Rochester's 2001-02 Thanks Giving Appeal total \$4.4 million from 42,400 donors.

"We are behind on the number of donors but slightly ahead in the dollar total when compared to the results at this time last year," said Daniel J. Healy, diocesan director of stewardship and development. "If we are to reach our goal of \$4.9 million and fund the many worthwhile and necessary programs, ministries and services, we need everyone to do their fair share. Every gift is important and needed."

Parishioners who have not made a commitment can do so at their parish or by mailing directly to the diocese's TGA Office at 1150 Buffalo Road, Rochester, NY 14624, Healy said.



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Monica Thompson, a former homeless woman, places a brick that stands for advocacy on the "foundation" of a new women's shelter, Sanctuary House, at a press conference in Rochester Dec. 3.

while seeking permanent housing. Due to welfare cutbacks, some may stay as long as 45 days, Bennett said. The largest percentage of women at the shelter have children under the age of 5, and they themselves are between 25 and 34, she added.

Monica R. Thompson, 31, lived at Women's Place this past April. She is currently employed and living with her husband and two children.

"What you're doing does work," Thompson told the audience at the ceremony. "It can help," she added, and the audience then gave her a standing ovation. Thompson later said she was touched that so many "important people" turned out for the ceremony.

Thompson and her husband noted in interviews with the *Courier* that her life took a long and difficult road before it wound up at Women's Place. Thompson's husband, Darrell, was convicted of a crime and incarcerated in 1999, when they were living in Long Island. She then went to North Carolina to live while her husband served his sentence in upstate New York. In prison, her husband said, he came to believe in Christ. Thompson said she came to believe he was sincere in his desire to live a good life.

"He went through some programs," she said of her husband. "He started changing. He found Christ, and thank God he did."

Thompson was still in North Carolina when he was released on probation late last year and began work in New York City. After some discussion, the couple decided to reunite and to live upstate, so he explored work release programs in Buffalo

and Rochester. They agreed that the quality of life was better in Rochester.

Thompson came to the area before her husband, who found a factory job and arrived in August. She knew no one, and had learned of Women's Place via Monroe County social services information on the Internet. Thompson, who works with a local credit counseling company, noted that at one time she had a high-paying job with an insurance company and never thought she would ever need to live in a shelter. However, she said she was willing to swallow her pride and enter Women's Place.

Thompson said there were plenty of activities for her children at Women's Place, and that she appreciated the various services the shelter offered.

"It's a good program," she said. "If you allow it to work for you, it will work."

She noted that it wasn't always easy to follow all the center's rules, which included daily chores and early curfews. In hindsight, she said, she realizes that Women's Place was simply encouraging her, as it did other women, not to consider the place a home for long, and to become independent as quickly as possible.

Thompson also said she spoke at the ceremony with the hope that at least one other woman in distress might learn her story and benefit by her example of a willingness to not give up on life.

"A place being there gave us the opportunity to start again," her husband added.

## Region picks Bishop Clark

Bishop Matthew H. Clark has been chosen by New York state's seven other bishops to represent the state's dioceses to the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.

The bishops made their choice during the Nov. 12-16 U.S. bishops' meeting in Washington, D.C.

The committee meets four times a year, according to Mercy Sister Mary Ann Walsh, the USCCB's spokeswoman. Among its duties, the committee reviews proposals and statements and makes recommendations for consideration by all the U.S. bishops at their plenary sessions.

The committee also oversees the work of the General Secretariat of the conference, reviews actions of the Executive Committee, and approves proposals of other committees prior to submission to the general membership.

The Administrative Committee consists of representatives of the conference's offices and the chairs of its standing committees, as well as representatives of the 10 regions of the U.S. Catholic Church. Bishop Clark was chosen by the other bishops, Walsh said. She noted that many more bishops than the 10 states contained in the region were present at the meeting. Clark was selected to represent the region. This appointment carries with it great responsibility, which fully embraces as part of my role in serving our Lord and all the faithful.

Bishop Clark is an excellent leader who is very sensitive to the larger picture and who is able to understand the needs of the bishops' conference. Sister Walsh said.

— Rob Cullivan

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