

Volunteers build homes on faith

Jennifer Burke/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — The sounds of laughter, hammering and occasional passing cars could be heard in the Fulton Avenue neighborhood Sept. 18, as volunteers moved piles of lumber and a front-end loader pushed dirt around the foundation of a new house.

Among those volunteers were five parishioners from Rochester's Immaculate Conception Parish, who were taking part in Habitat for Humanity's "Building on Faith Week" by helping to build houses in the neighborhood.

Building on Faith Week is a worldwide Habitat for Humanity event celebrating church and faith-community partnerships. Diane Davis, resources manager for Flower City Habitat for Humanity, said the local organization decided to take part in the event for the first time this year as a way to reach out to inner-city churches.

"We realized there's so many faith communities we haven't touched yet," Davis said. "Many of the people who become Habitat for Humanity homeowners are going to inner-city churches, and their churches aren't involved."

Dick Sprenkle, president of FCHH's board, agreed.

"There's been a feeling that the suburbs build houses for the city," he said. "We're really trying to get away from that."

Musette Castle, an Immaculate Conception parishioner and vice president of FCHH's board, invited her parish to take part in Building on Faith Week. She said four parishioners took her up on the offer, with

many more saying they'd help if she could arrange a Saturday session.

Two of Immaculate Conception's volunteers, Mary Wingo and Don Toyer, took vacation days from their jobs Sept. 18 in order to participate.

"Every day I work in an office, pushing pens and paper. I've always wanted to do this but I never knew how to get involved," Wingo said, adding that her only regret was that volunteers aren't allowed to use power tools.

Toyer said he was glad Castle helped Immaculate Conception parishioners learn how to get involved.

"It's a nice way to volunteer. You can actually see something materialize," Toyer said.

Beatrice Thompson, also from Immaculate Conception, said she liked having the chance to build things and might consider volunteering with FCHH in the future.

Although this is the fifth house Castle has worked on, she said the experience is different each time.

"It's just a different experience because you don't know what stage a house is at," Castle explained as she and Toyer examined pieces of lumber that would be used to build the floor of the house. The pair had been taught to look for the crown, or the curve, of the wood so the boards could be laid properly.

According to Castle, volunteers don't need to have any construction experience, and supervisors teach them the skills necessary for each task before they are put to work. One time, she and her daughter even learned to lay a tongue-and-groove porch floor, she said.



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Mary Wingo (right) and Beatrice Thompson of Rochester's Immaculate Conception Parish help with the installation of support beams for a Habitat for Humanity house on Emerson Street in Rochester Sept. 18.

Castle added she is proud of the work FCHH has done in Rochester, and noted that when the organization builds houses in an area with cooperation from groups such as Providence Housing and the Urban League of Rochester, the culture of the area can be changed. Sometimes new homeowners are so proud of their revitalized neighborhoods that they look out for each other, and

push drug activity and other negative influences out of the community altogether, she added.

Immaculate Conception parishioner Graeme Roberts said he was grateful for the chance to help make a difference.

"I like to try to serve in any way I can," Roberts said. "I think this is just a splendid thing. It's just great when everybody's pitching in."

Cardinal laments decline of civility in society

CHICAGO (CNS) — The increasing lack of civility in today's society is also present in the church, Chicago Cardinal Francis E. George writes in his column for the Sept. 14-28 edition of the *Catholic New World*, Chicago's archdiocesan newspaper.

"Public irritability, undisguised rage, raw ambition, lack of basic honesty and plain rudeness are no longer masked by at least a pretense of politeness when a controversial subject is introduced," he wrote. "A difference of opinion is

contorted into an attack upon a person. A decline in common standards of decent speech and behavior is evidence of a lack of common standards and common goals for our society."

The cardinal noted that civility also has a religious dimension. He noted that some could describe Jesus as not being civil and would say that "he denounced his enemies as hypocrites and accused his friends of lack of faith."

But the cardinal pointed out that Jesus "rejected violence and de-

manded love of enemies and patience in suffering."

He said other religious examples of civility include St. Francis, who wrote: "Realize, dear brothers and sisters, that courtesy is one of the properties of God. It is the sister of charity, by which hatred is vanquished and love is cherished."

Cardinal George noted that civility is a sign of humility and a "recognition that one is not the center of the universe." A civil person, he added, "is grateful because he or she recognizes that life itself is a gift for

which one can only say "thank you."

Pointing out that "if civility is in trouble in society at large, it's also in trouble in the church," the cardinal said public conversation among members of the church "requires the self-discipline made possible by charity."

"To be Catholic means sharing common beliefs and moral convictions," he said, adding that "when our life in the church is marked by polarization and impatience, communion of faith and worship is weakened."

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