

Shuttered rectory sees rebirth as Mother Teresa Home

by MARK CIEMCIOCH

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Cheryl Calire, director of Pro-Life Activities, and Alan Stahl of Mader Construction talk about the progress on Mother Teresa House in Buffalo.
(Patrick McPartland/Staff Photographer)

Becoming pregnant while facing an uncertain and unstable future forces women to make one of the most important decisions of their lives. The diocesan Office of Pro-Life Activities is now working to build a ministry that hopefully eases the stress of that decision.

Over the past few months, administrators and volunteers have been working at 208 Stanislaus St. in Buffalo, the former rectory of St. Adalbert Church, which closed a few years ago. The goal is to create a temporary residence for pregnant women to regain their footing in the world while bringing their baby into it, a ministry that will be called the Mother Teresa Home.

"The overall desire is to be able to have women who have chosen life, or are on the fence about choosing life because of finances, a place where they can stay," said Cheryl Calire, diocesan director of Pro-Life Activities.

The rectory, which has not been used in about a decade, is currently in the midst of a top-to-bottom renovation as Calire prepares the new residence. The building will have several bedrooms, as well as a communal kitchen, laundry room, computer library and chapel. While women stay at the residence, they can enroll in GED classes to help improve their education or find a job, as Calire is establishing a relationship with the Response to Love Center, a neighbor social service ministry run by Sister Johnice Rzadkiewicz, CSSF.

Calire said the plan is to empower, not enable, residents of the Mother Teresa Home, by making them cook, clean and care for themselves and a newborn, as well as giving them a foundation to eventually leave.

"(There's) a plan where they're actively enrolled in school, a vocation or working, so they can get themselves their own place and assimilated into society," Calire said. "What I have found in doing this work is that many of the women we're helping, trying to get them to see the advantage of life, is if their significant other or the other person they were living with moves out, they can't afford the place by themselves. It becomes part of the X-factor for them to make a decision based strictly on finances, so we're trying to take out that piece of the equation if we can. We have found it's difficult to place a lot of people in these other agencies because when they accept state and federal funding, they have to go on a list that might put them 20 or 25 (down) before they would ever get housing. We're trying to be a stop gap."

Volunteers have been helping out where they can. An Eagle Scout leading a group of Boy Scouts helped build a vegetable garden outside the home. Other people have repainted over some of the graffiti around the surrounding property, such as the group Young Neighbors in Action.

For Calire, the Mother Teresa Home is not just a ministry, it's a personal sacrifice. She and her husband, David, left their home in Lancaster to move into the Mother Teresa Home while it's being renovated, placing themselves in the center of one of the poorest neighborhoods of Buffalo.

"I'm not just saying, 'Oh let's just do this (renovation),' " Calire said. "Anybody can do that. We can all just buy one of these run-down places and fix it up, but we're making a commitment. We've actually had people, who live in the neighborhood, stop and say, 'This is the change we want to see.' People can talk about it all the time, if people don't do it, then people are just talking about it. You're not going to see that momentum, like what we're seeing on Main Street (in Buffalo). Who would have thought five years ago Main Street would look the way it does now? Do I think it will happen here in five years? Probably not, but I do think little by little, people want to make things better."

Calire acknowledges that the perception of the neighborhood looms large, but they've adapted comfortably. A state-of-the-art security system was installed that connects to her smartphone, but even beyond that, the Calires have gotten to know the neighbors as well.

"I was born and raised in the suburbs, so was my husband," she said. "I feel totally safe here, but it took a while. It's a different culture that you have to learn (about), but that's part of it too. I feel regardless of what circumstance somebody comes from, when they're in a scenario where they need help, if we can give them a safe environment, they should feel as confident (as we do)."

The Mother Teresa Home is operating on donations for now. As the building is being renovated, special attention is being made to preserve as much of the original interior details as possible, such as the elaborate crown molding along the ceiling. There is also a plan to build an office and separate bedroom for an eventual residence director, who will move in once the Calires, who have made a five-year commitment to live at the residence, have it well underway. The Mother Teresa Home is expected to open in late 2016.

"This isn't about David and Cheryl Calire, this is about being here 50 or 60 years from now," Calire said. "Our whole ministry here is based on having a director who will be able to move in here and run this house. The whole idea of the director is to guide them on the path of parenting, their career, spiritual life, and really try to get them on track."

To make a donation to the Mother Teresa Home call the Office of Pro-Life Activities at 716-847-2205.