

Mother Teresa Home opens doors and hearts to new mothers

by PATRICK J. BUECHI

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David and Cheryl Calire are ready to open the doors to Mother Teresa Home on Buffalo's East Side. (Patrick McPartland/Managing Editor)

Home is where Cheryl Calire's heart is. After a year of cleaning, carpentry and more cleaning, she will open the Mother Teresa Home, a place for women who have chosen life to live. The ribbon-cutting and dedication will take place Thursday, Aug. 25, with Bishop Richard J. Malone blessing the house.

Located at 208 Stanislaus St. on Buffalo's East Side, in the former rectory of St. Adalbert Church, Mother Teresa Home will empower women struggling to survive, while protecting the lives of their children. As the director of the diocesan Office of Pro-Life Activities, Calire encourages pregnant women to say "yes" to life.

She has prayed outside of abortion clinics and spoken one-on-one to women uncertain of their future. She has also gone the next step by providing clothing and resources for these women through the St. Gianna Molla Pregnancy Outreach Center, now with three locations. With a baby in their arms and clothes on their back, Calire is now offering them a roof over their heads.

The pastoral mission of the Mother Teresa Home is to promote the safety, stability and well-being of women who have experienced or been exposed to pressure in regards to their pregnancy. Through partners such as the nearby Response to Love Center, the women will take part in educational programs and career counseling. Calire and her husband, David, have signed on for a five-year term as executive directors. They just celebrated one year at the house in June.

The idea of creating this home came to Calire five years ago while in adoration. She realized that, while she was actively protecting the unborn, she needed to do something for the children once they came into the world. She noticed the diocese had many unused rectories and convents that could be used for housing.

"One gap I have found is a place for some of these women to live from a financial standpoint, from an education standpoint, to be able to get on their feet if they decide to choose life. We work with many agencies, but there is much more complication in regards to getting placement," she said.

Other homes with similar goals, like Gerard Place and Homespace, receive county and federal funding, which bring with it some rules, such as needing to be homeless for 30 days before being eligible to being placed on a housing list. Mother Teresa Home can help people who fall through the cracks.

Calire expects residents to come in while pregnant and stay six to 18 months. During this time, they will be enrolled in vocational school, a GED program or college, or working during the day. They will be connected to services, doctors and parenting classes.

The Response to Love Center, located next door in the former St. Adalbert School, will partner with the home to offer many of these classes.

"What I have to offer is a spiritual and holistic welcome with hospitality, spiritual guidance, and practical, everyday life skills," said Sister M. Johnice Rzadkiewicz, CSSF, executive director of the center. "When the new moms will be coming to our center, we will offer them a warm welcome and an opportunity to share in a home-cooked meal. After meeting with them, we will invite them to visit the food pantry where they can receive grocery bags and also recipes on how to prepare the food. The availability of clothing for themselves and their babies will be provided through the thrift shops."

Response to Love also offers Test Assessing Secondary Completion, a state-of-the-art, national high school equivalency assessment and training program, as well as English as a Second Language classes offered on-site and tuition-free. An employment program will guide these women through résumé writing and job training. Health care seminars and blood pressure checks are also offered.

"What we want to do is welcome all to our place with a compassionate heart and presence as we journey together," Sister Johnice said.

Calire stresses the concept of home and community. By contributing to the household, residents can benefit. As a rewards system, residents will earn points for doing the work they are expected to do. Points can be redeemed for furniture or cookery when it is time for them to leave.

"I didn't know where this place was going to be, but I knew I wanted to call it Mother Teresa Home," she said, while giving a tour. "I was pretty adamant about using the word 'home' instead of 'house' because I wanted it to be a home atmosphere, but also a place that would empower, not enable, women who have made the choice for life, but due to the circumstances that they're coming from, need a little help to get over the hump."

Each resident will have a bedroom and a shared bathroom, as well as a community living room, kitchen and computer lab. Each room is named after a saint or other Church dignitary. So, the residents will eat in the Pope Francis Dining Room and study in the Bishop Malone Library.

"We will definitely have a Catholic presence because we are under the umbrella of the diocese, so we are passionately Catholic and don't apologize for it," Calire said. "However, it is ecumenical in nature. Anyone can stay here - people of all faiths, people of no faith. That's what's been beautiful about starting this ministry. Many of the volunteers and organizations that come here have not been Catholic. They just heard about what we're doing, and they're really excited about it. It's given them a new perspective on the Catholic Church. Not only are we talking about what people should do, but we're putting our beliefs into action."

Community members who have helped include Young Neighbors in Action, Rosary Society, Canisius High School, Sacred Heart Academy, Knights of Columbus and Quota International. Kohl's Department Store had some employees volunteer. Some Boy Scouts built a garden as an Eagle project. A priest from Syracuse built an altar and ambo used in the chapel.

The Mother Teresa Home will open at a dedication on Aug. 25, the vigil of Mother Teresa's birthday, beginning with Mass at 4 p.m., inside St. Adalbert Church. Guests include Robert and Maryellen White from the St. Gianna Molla Society. The veneration of St. Gianna's relics will follow the Mass.