

## Mother Teresa Home helps homeless mothers

by PATRICK J. BUECHI

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Staff Reporter



The staff of the Mother Teresa House, Emerson Stevens (left to right), Sarah Molitor, Director Cheryl Calire, Cheryl Zielen-Ersing and Miriam Escalante, welcomed their first residents in September. (Dan Cappellazzo/Staff Photographer)

When Cheryl Calire unlocked the door to the former St. Adalbert rectory, she opened a new life for women and their babies. Through the Mother Teresa Home, she will offer a roof over the heads for homeless women who have chosen to raise their babies.

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.

Calire, the director of the diocesan Department of Pro-Life Activities, and her team will work to provide a homey atmosphere for up to five guests and their children at the house. Guests will be expected to do their part in cleaning and cooking when they are not working on bettering their lives.

During the day, Sarah Molitor will watch over the residents. As assistant coordinator of the Mother Teresa Home, her main job will be to connect the guests to government services, educational programs and job placement.

"Everything from bus routes to setting up parenting classes to working with them on Bible studies that we will be having in the evenings," Molitor said of her duties.

Fresh from graduating from Franciscan University of Steubenville, Molitor wanted to put her social work degree to good use in the Church. Her mother read about the Mother Teresa Home and brought it to her attention.

<https://www.wncatholic.org/news/article/featured/2016/10/17/101932/mother-teresa-home-helps-homeless-mothers>

"I was looking at entry-level social work positions, but I was itching to work for the Church as well, because I didn't want to compromise my beliefs. In social work, it's a liberal-leaning field sometimes," Molitor said. "Seeing the Mother Teresa Home's mission looking through its Facebook page, I knew I needed to be a part of that. I wanted to help women. My heart's always been there for women."

Interestingly, Molitor crossed paths with Calire six years ago, when the then-teen worked with the Beggars for Life, a group of pro-life teenagers and kids who collected 1 million pennies to show the value of the smallest things.

Also on the Home team will be Deacon Steve Schumer and his wife, Mary, with the staff of the diocesan Office of Pro-Life Activities pitching in where needed. Calire and her husband, David, will live at the home to be with the guests at night.

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. 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.

"From the day a woman moves into our place, Sarah and I are putting together a plan for them to move out, not to be construed as a punitive measure. The whole idea of the program is to help them be able to get on their own two feet; to have that dignity to know, yes, they can do it," Calire said.

"Mostly through empowerment, not just enabling them. We want to specifically empower them," added Molitor.

The Mother Teresa Home strategy comes from research Calire had done examining best practices from homes from across the country.

"I did look at other agencies across the country and I've spoken to many people in the past few years as I developed this business plan, and what I found was, just like anything else, there are some things that really work well and some things that maybe weren't working so well," she said. "So, I tried to take the good nuggets out of different things. Then, of course, through prayer and adoration, I came up with some ideas on my own."

One aspect unique to the home is that each guest will need a sponsor to agree to take responsibility for the guest if she causes any difficulties to the rest of the community. Calire found few places that had an exit strategy to remove them from the home.

The Homeless Alliance of Western New York reported that 7,948 people experienced homelessness from Oct. 1, 2013 to Sept. 30, 2014. An estimated 1,115 people in the

Erie-Niagara region are homeless on any given night. An estimated 508 families, mostly single mothers, entered homeless shelters during that time.

"They come from a wide variety of backgrounds, not what many would think would be your 'typical,'" said Calire. "We have everything from someone in her early 20s, just starting college, to someone who already has a degree who's in her early 30s. People have found, if you turn on the news or read the newspaper, every day of the week, have found themselves in circumstances that they may have never dreamed they would be in. There are a whole host of reasons that lead someone to becoming homeless. It's becoming more and more prevalent in our area, regardless of whether a woman is pregnant or not."

For the first resident, expected to move in as soon as she has her daughter, Lisa (not her real name) found confirmation that her life, and the life of her daughter, matter.

"I'm having a baby. Unfortunately, I am not being supported by the father and the members of my family aren't all able to provide me with everything I need," she said. "I am not able to provide myself with everything I need. Once I was in this situation, it felt like I had no choice at all in what to do. I came across Cheryl through someone in my church. Basically, she just took me in and I was able to actually decide for myself what I want to do about having my baby. Honestly, without that I don't think I would have been able to keep her. At the time when I saw her I was thinking of having an abortion, actually. So, I was basically given validation by someone who, like, my life that matters and so did hers. So, I could live with my situation and deal with it and just be treated like a person and not feel like the whole thing was a crisis that I had to scramble to figure out on my own."

Mother Teresa Home will offer not just a meal and a bed, but that proverbial village it takes to raise a child.

"They're providing me with a place to live. That, itself is huge," Lisa said. "Without that, I wouldn't have the security to keep my child because I wouldn't have anywhere for us to live and I would be struggling on my own. I wouldn't have extra guidance from anywhere else," she said. "They're also providing pretty much any help I'm going to need as far as getting a new job or deciding what I want to do about work or school. They're providing me with pretty much any materials that I am going to need for my child that I can't provide myself. It's obviously providing protection too, because without it, I wouldn't have anywhere else to go. So, I know I am going into someplace where I'm genuinely cared for."

People dealing with an unexpected pregnancy can call or apply online. Calire will find the right contact for that person's situation, whether it be a visit to Mother Teresa's or referral to another agency. Call 716-847-2205, or in an emergency 716-847-2211.