

# Serving Women and Children

## Malta House moving to larger facility

NORWALK—Over the past 20 years, Malta House has served more than 600 mothers and babies through its residential program and many more with its community programs. At the end of the year, Malta House 2 will open at a former convent behind All Saints School, which will allow the organization to assist more than 1,500 mothers and babies over the next 20 years.

"We are really excited about the opportunity this will give us," said Carey Dougherty, executive director. "We often have a waiting list, and sometimes we have to turn people away, which is why we are moving into a larger space where we can grow."

The project is being made possible through a \$4 million capital campaign, \$3 million of which will pay for renovation of the convent and moving expenses, and \$1 million to establish a capital reserve. For more information or to donate to the Growing the Mission in a New Home campaign, which has received \$3.6 million, contact the campaign office at [campaign@maltahouse.org](mailto:campaign@maltahouse.org) or call 203.857.0088.

Malta House is the only group home for pregnant women over 18 in Fairfield County and one of a limited number of residential programs for parenting mothers and their babies, Dougherty said. Since its doors opened in 1998, it has provided 7,763 nights of shelter, helped bring 345 babies into the world and assisted 319 mothers in getting back on their feet.

"Our goal is to empower women to live independently and provide a better life for themselves and their children," said Dougherty, who has worked at Malta House since 2017.

The new location will increase residential capacity by 50 percent, offer short-term housing for pregnant women in a crisis situation, provide space for private counseling and group classes, expand on-campus services with community partners, and provide a playground and green space for children. There will be space for a chapel, meeting rooms, offices, dining and kitchen areas, a private residential area on the second floor, a reading room and nursery.

The plans include 15 bedrooms, three of which will be family suites that can accom-



modate a mother and up to two children, which would allow 33 people—15 women and 18 children—to live at the house.

"I always believed that Malta House put some muscle behind our faith regarding the dignity and sanctity of life," said Michael O'Rourke of Stamford, who founded Malta House in 1995. "It's one thing to step into the sanctuary of a church and pray for the unborn. We can all comfort each other while railing against the evils of abortion. However, Malta House is where the rubber meets the road, whereby we take the importance of the dignity and sanctity of life and put a pregnant woman's face to it—helping that woman with all her struggles and fears."

Dougherty said that many of the pregnant women who come to Malta House are homeless and have never lived independently or have come from "unsafe or fragmented families." Malta House

regularly receives referrals from hospitals, social service agencies, shelters and programs that will not accept a woman who is pregnant or a new mother.

"One thing that always catches me off guard in this county, where there is so much wealth, is that over 300 babies are born every year to mothers who live below the poverty line, to mothers who are homeless," Dougherty said. "We believe a mother deserves every opportunity to a life of self-sufficiency and independence. Every baby deserves to be born into a world of safety and love. We are trying to be the family and support network to mothers who need to improve their lives and are looking for a future of independence."

The residents participate in life skills classes in health, nutrition, parenting and child development and personal finance. Dougherty said Malta House is the only home in the state that offers these

services, and residents have come from as far away as Massachusetts, Hartford and the Bronx.

"We try to provide our mothers all the same things we make sure our own kids know by 18 when they are ready to leave home," Dougherty said. The house assists them with education, employment, financial literacy, health and nutrition, fitness, spirituality and parenting. There is also free childcare so the mothers can go to school or work.

The average stay is eight months, but it can extend up to 18 months until a mother has saved sufficient money and secured housing.

"Malta House is where the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist converges with the presence of Christ in the women and children we serve," O'Rourke said. "We lift our women up through education, training and spiritual counseling and introduce them to prayer."

Rather than treating them as 'neutral poverty stricken pregnant objects' devoid of virtue, we help them to become moral actors and contributors to the community. We want them to appreciate how and why they will make a difference in this world, especially since they are children of God destined for heaven."

Dougherty said success is measured by a number of criteria, such as how much money a woman has saved, steady employment, stable housing and the life skills classes she has attended.

There have been many success stories over the past 22 years, she said, and one in particular stands out, which involved a young mother who came to Malta House nine years ago with a five-month-old baby.

"Her boyfriend hurt her badly and she was in the hospital," Dougherty said. "She couldn't go back to him and her mother wouldn't take her in, so she went to the Department of Social Services. They went down the list of all the shelters in the area, but they were either full or could take her but not the baby, which meant she was one step closer to the Department of Children and Families taking her baby to foster care."

The last call they made was to Malta House, which had an available bed.

"She came to stay with us," Dougherty said. "She got a job and last year, she started working with us. Today she is living on her own, and her child is in fifth grade. That is what Malta House is all about."

### CORONAVIRUS UPDATE FROM PAGE 6

Prayer that can be downloaded and printed for use throughout the day.

Grosso said the resource material on the web page is designed to help the faithful educate themselves on the Coronavirus, practice good personal health habits, and take all necessary precautions issued by health officials.

Among the recommendations listed on the web page:

Anyone who is ill, anyone who suspects they are ill, or anyone who had contact with someone exhibiting flu-like symptoms should refrain from participation in public activities, including Mass. As has always been the

case, if you need to refrain from Sunday Mass due to illness, you are dispensed from the Sunday obligation.

Educate yourself on the Coronavirus, practice good personal health habits, and take all necessary precautions issued by the Center for Disease Control and World Health Organization seriously.

Catholics who visit the site are asked remember to pray for an end to this illness and to keep all those who have died from and who are adversely affected by the Coronavirus in your prayers.

(Visit the diocesan website at: [www.bridgeportdiocese.com](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.com).)

### FOOD PANTRIES FROM PAGE 7

Bishop Caggiano offers this prayer: This is a time when we must offer intercessory prayers for all those who have died from this disease, that they may rest in the Lord's peace. We must pray for consolation for their families and loved ones during their time of sorrow and grief. Let us also pray for those who have been sickened by the virus, that they will soon recover, and for all those who are quarantined and are living alone and in fear. Finally, let us pray that this emergency may pass and that our love for one another will help us to make the right decisions to keep each other safe.

The Diocese of Bridgeport is

continually monitoring the status of the virus in the Fairfield County community, consulting with health care professionals and experts when appropriate.

In response to the growing number of calls and concerns related to the Coronavirus and its impact on liturgical practices, the diocese has produced a special web page to offer the latest news, resources and information.

(People throughout the diocese can visit the website at any time for updates: [www.bridgeportdiocese.org/coronavirus-resources-and-information](http://www.bridgeportdiocese.org/coronavirus-resources-and-information). For more information on Catholic Charities' programs visit: [ccfairfield.org](http://ccfairfield.org).)