



SISTERS  
of  
CHARITY  
NEW YORK

# Vision

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Sr. Patricia Brennan has been a counselor and social worker at Fox House since 1989.

## Building Houses, Building Lives

by Eric P. Feldmann

When the Sisters of Charity of New York first articulated their purposes in their certificate of incorporation in January of 1849, they had, as their focus, the very people who, over 160 years later, are being served through the housing programs they sponsor.

The mission statement for their housing efforts reflects their concern for those with the greatest vulnerability. In part, it states that the Sisters of Charity of New York sponsor housing “as a concrete expression of our mission to reveal God’s love to all in need, especially the poor.” This commitment is an affirmation of the

importance of affordable housing for all.

Today, the Sisters of Charity sponsor nearly 500 units of housing with more than an additional 200 units under development.

The housing serves people who are elderly, mentally ill, formerly homeless and young, single mothers with babies. It spans a wide geographic area, from Staten Island to Manhattan to Rockland County.

Despite the range of programs offered, there are common characteristics: the housing is affordable, secure and well-

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## Building Houses

(continued from front cover)

maintained; residents are treated with dignity and offered services appropriate for their individual needs.

The first housing was developed on Staten Island in the mid 1980s. Under the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Section 202 Program, 75 units of affordable housing for the elderly were created on property originally owned by Olivet Presbyterian Church. To this day, there continues to be a strong relationship between the church and the Sisters of Charity; the current board chair is a member of the parish.

Since then, three additional 202 programs with a total of 217 units – St. Vincent’s Manor, St. Elizabeth’s Manor and Sister Elizabeth Boyle Manor – have been developed on Staten Island.



Joseph House on Staten Island was the Congregation’s first housing development.

Under the 202 program, HUD provides the capital financing and operating subsidies needed. Each of the buildings has its own social service coordinator who offers recreational programming, helps residents with entitlements and provides access to community-based support services.

Residents of the 202 housing pay 30% of their



Seton Village in Nanuet looks like a condo community on a golf course.

adjusted income for their apartments; the Federal government pays the balance. Applicants must be 62 years of age or older and meet a maximum income threshold. They must also have a need based on spending 50% or more of their income on housing, living in substandard housing or being at risk of eviction.

In the late 1990s, the Sisters began planning for a 106-unit, affordable housing program for those 55 years of age and older. Today, Seton Village in Nanuet is a reality. It has three residence buildings

and a community center spread across a 14-acre campus. As with the housing on Staten Island, there is a social service coordinator. At Seton Village, this position is held by a member of the Congregation, Sr. Eileen P. Walsh, RN. The project was built with Low Income Housing Tax Credits and

bond funds. Residents’ rents are based on their income.

In the mid 1990s, two additional projects were developed by the Sisters of Charity in Manhattan. Seton House, on Lexington Avenue at 121 Street, provides affordable housing to 16 families, 



many of whom were formerly homeless. Space within the building is rented to Harms Reduction, a community-based, not-for-profit coalition that offers counseling services to at-risk young people and adults. Seton House was built with funding from New York City. Casa Cecilia, which has 35 units spread between two buildings, is located in the Hamilton Heights section of Manhattan, on 153 Street just off Broadway. As with Seton House, Casa Cecilia offers housing to low-income families.



In the beginning: Sr. Florence Speth reviews blueprints for Fox House, which was still on the drawing board in this 1985 photo. With her is Joseph Druffel, known as the architect of the poor.

Also in Manhattan, on E. 117 Street, is Fox House. Sr. Florence Speth, who has worked with the poor in East Harlem for all her religious life, helped plan and develop this Tier II shelter. She has served as its executive director since it opened in 1989. Fox House is unique in that it provides housing, meals and support services to young, single mothers and their babies. The goal of Fox House is to offer transitional housing while the residents develop life skills to allow them to live in permanent, community-based housing.

Last year, Sr. Ann Citarella began working as the mission coordinator for the housing programs

operated by the Sisters of Charity. She insures that the residents and staff of the housing are mindful of the Congregation's housing mission. She also works with the social service coordinators, particularly in Manhattan, as they respond to the challenges facing the residents.

The housing efforts of the Congregation are very often carried out in collaboration with other not-for-profit organizations. On Staten Island, the social service programming is implemented under contract with the Community Agency for Senior Citizens and the Jewish Community Center. In Manhattan, the operational management and social service coordination are provided in partnership with West End Intergeneration Housing Development Fund Company.

Each of the housing programs has a separate board made up of Sisters of Charity and dedicated community residents. Drawing upon their areas of expertise, the board members help review policies, monitor the finances and provide counsel to the staff.

Currently, the Congregation has two other 202 projects under development on Staten Island, one with 60 units and another with 80 units. It also is completing construction on a 19-unit project being built on Staten Island under the HUD Section 811 Program, which is very much like the 202 Program but for residents with special needs. This project, Sister Louise de Marillac Manor, will serve the mentally ill.

The Congregation also is developing a 50-unit project for formerly homeless women with mentally disorders and their children. Sophia House will be on a parcel of land next to Casa Cecilia which the Congregation recently purchased from The New York Foundling, another Congregation-sponsored agency. There will be on-site support from social service personnel.

For more information on the housing sponsored directly by the Sisters of Charity of New York, please call Eric Feldmann's office at 718-477-6803. ■

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