



The Mission

Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Arlington

Spring 2009

St. Margaret's Offers Families Hope and Housing

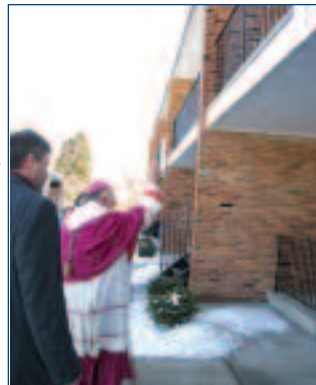
Catholic Charities' new family transitional housing opened March 4, with Bishop Paul S. Loverde leading the dedication and Executive Director Stephen Luteran welcoming guests. The Bishop announced the name of the new facility for homeless families: St. Margaret of Cortona Transitional Residences and leads attendees in prayer at the March 4 dedication.

"May peace be with all those who will live in these new residences," said the bishop. "May the Lord enter these residences and bless them with His presence. For all who work here, may He nurture your love for each other."

The bishop prayed that St. Margaret's would become "a dwelling place of love, diffusing far and wide the goodness of Christ" and help "families who are in great distress."

In his opening remarks, the bishop thanked those attending the dedication in Woodbridge, especially representatives of government and private organizations.

Bishop Loverde blesses St. Margaret of Cortona Transitional Residences and leads attendees in prayer at the March 4 dedication.



Photos by Jeanne Spaeth



Attendees from the Prince William County Board of Supervisors included Maureen Caddigan, John Jenkins, Michael May, and Frank Principi.

Catholic Charities' Board President Linda McMahon thanked "all responsible for what you see here before you," including Beth Luteran, "who found this site by combing through real-estate lists on the internet while working as a stay-at-home mom."

Board Member Michael Catlett thanked HomeAid, the nonprofit service arm of Northern Virginia Building Industry Association, for overseeing the renovation work done by many companies, including Beazer Homes, which served as the "builder captain."

Renovations of the 14-unit facility purchased in 2008 include new flooring and carpeting; kitchen cabinets and appliances; heating/air conditioning units and water heaters; plumbing; lighting; playroom; concrete walks and paving; stairs and railings; decks;

and playground, fencing, and landscaping.

Companies that provided materials and services at cost or gratis include Atlas Plumbing, B&K Hardware, Better than Wood, C&P Construction, Capital and Lighting Supply, Capital Carpets Inc., Century Tile, Commercial Concrete, DM Household, Eastern Applicators, EN Services, General Electric Appliances, Ideal Construction Services, KT Enterprises Inc., Masonry Masters, Progress Lighting, R&F Metals Inc., Timberlake, and Urban Engineering.

Catholic Charities' Executive Director Stephen Luteran welcomes guests to the Woodbridge site.



Photo by Jeanne Spaeth



Catholic Charities' Board member Michael Catlett (left) and Fabio Ayala visit the renovated units. Catlett, a certified construction manager, served as the Board's liaison to the agencies doing the renovation work.

Photo by Jeanne Spaeth

FROM THE DESK OF **Stephen Luteran**

Photo by Jeanne Spaeth



Stephen Luteran

After many years of planning, we are pleased to begin operation of St. Margaret of Cortona Transitional Residences for homeless families. The opening of St. Margaret's is made possible through the Diocese's Rooted in Faith—Forward in Hope capital campaign.

We are grateful to Bishop Loverde and the Diocese for helping us make this program a reality. We are also thankful to HomeAid of Northern Virginia

and Beazer Homes for overseeing the renovation work, which was done in record time and saved Catholic Charities more than \$250,000 in renovation costs.

Why does our new program bear the name of St. Margaret of Cortona? She is the patron saint of the homeless and lay women. Despite the fact that she lived centuries ago, the obstacles she overcame would be familiar to many of today's homeless families.

Saint Margaret struggled as a young, single mother in 13th century Italy. Rejected by family and friends, she ended up

homeless, living on the streets with her small son and begging for food. She eventually earned a living by nursing the sick and later joined the Third Order of St. Francis, becoming an advocate for the poor.

St. Margaret's will be a place of hope and refuge—and another example of how Catholic Charities is “bringing the Gospel to life.”

Stephen Luteran, MSW, LCSW
Executive Director
Catholic Charities
Diocese of Arlington

Resident Families to Be Offered Mentoring

As a volunteer at St. Margaret's, Ron Riggins is helping to organize a Family Mentorship program that will recruit families from nearby parishes to serve as mentors for the homeless families coming to live at St. Margaret's.

“The mentoring family will provide love and support, general nurturing, and examples of life skills,” says Ron. “This is not about financial sponsorship as much as about being a friend and offering to give advice when residents are making decisions regarding, for example, their children, job searches, or family problems.”

Typically, the mentoring family would meet with the resident family about every two weeks and would celebrate birthdays and holidays with them. Mentoring families would receive training before they meet a family and would go through an application process and background check by Catholic Charities.

Prior to his involvement at St. Margaret's, Ron had been assisting with the Christ House

program as a volunteer and supporter.

Ron entered the Church on Easter 2003, much to the joy of his wife and three children.

Though baptized as a child, he lost his Christian (Presbyterian) faith during his college years before starting his career as a banking consultant. But things changed on 9/11/2001 when, from his Rosslyn office, he witnessed the explosion at the Pentagon.

“This was a conversion moment,” recalls Ron. “I realized I had been ignoring God's call for a long time. I had a sudden fear of death and a sudden desire to pray.” The following year, he entered the RCIA program.

Call 703-910-4845 for more details about mentoring.



Ron Riggins and Bishop Loverde

Photo by Jeanne Spaeth

Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness

Homelessness is on the rise in the metropolitan Washington area according to a 2009 survey conducted by the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments that shows 12,012 homeless individuals in the area.

Catholic Charities has been helping homeless men at its Christ House Shelter and now will assist homeless families at St. Margaret's.

What are the contributing factors that lead to homelessness? Financial hardship or job loss is certainly a key element, but often adding to the crisis are isolation from family and friends, medical problems, debt accrual, addictions, and psychological stress.

Families may find themselves homeless when they miss rent payments because of low-paying jobs or wage loss from inability to report to work due to lack of transportation or affordable childcare. Sometimes domestic arguments or abuse may drive a family apart, often leaving the mother and children searching for a safe place to live.

In the recent financial crisis, some families have become homeless when their apartment building has been foreclosed on and they can not find another



Courtesy of St. Margaret of Cortona Church, Rotterdam Junction NY

Homelessness was the plight of young Margaret of Cortona in 13th century Italy. She fought her way out of poverty, became a champion of the poor, and was canonized in 1728. Catholic Charities' transitional housing bears her name.

affordable place to live.

When the homeless try to break out of their desperate situation, the process is slow and challenging. Immediate help is usually found at an emergency shelter that provides food, a place to sleep and, if needed, clothing. When a family or individual starts to regain some independence, perhaps by finding employment, the next step is usually to enter transitional housing.

Transitional housing, such as St. Margaret's, provides support to residents exiting emergency shelters and striving to regain self-sufficiency. The residents receive assistance from case managers who help arrange for counseling, access to social services, and training in such areas as personal finances, job skills, parenting, and life skills. Typically residents are expected to be employed and to contribute a small portion of their wages toward rent and a savings account that they will use when they are ready to assume full independence.

Thanks to Supporters

An outpouring of contributions to Catholic Charities' February 7 furniture fair made possible the furnishing of all the units at St. Margaret's. The fair called for gently used furniture, new or gently used dishes and glassware, new linens, and other household items.

More than 40 truckloads of furniture and household goods were donated by parishes, organizations, and individuals. Contributors include Diocesan parishes, Goodwin House of Alexandria, Kiwanis of Arlington, NVR Homes, and the Heatherwood Retirement Community. The donations represent an estimated cost savings of \$27,000.

On February 21, many volunteers participated in a group "housewarming" that involved sorting items, moving and arranging furniture, making up beds, filling kitchen cabinets with dishes and serving ware, and placing throw rugs and other items.

Catholic Charities thanks all contributors and asks for their support in providing items still needed:

- Baby gates and high chairs
 - Diapers
 - Folding metal chairs
 - Bunk beds, double beds (not queen or king), and cribs
 - New cookware, pots, and pans
 - Utensils and flatware.
- Call 703-910-4845 to help.



Photo by Celeste Reed

The Mission, Spring 2009
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Family Transitional Housing Aims to Succeed

As St. Margaret's opens its doors to homeless families, Program Director Christine Neijstrom is seeing the culmination of months of program planning by herself and other staff members and volunteers.

While the family transitional housing units in Woodbridge were being renovated, Christine and Associate Director of Community Services Sally O'Dwyer led outreach efforts to foster cooperation with nearby parishes and organizations to ensure that St. Margaret's would be a welcome presence in Prince William County.

"The response of Diocesan parishes has been very welcoming and positive," says Christine. She thanks Holy Family and Nativity parishes for donating furniture and household goods and St. Mary of Sorrows parish for donations and volunteers who sorted and organized goods. Other contributing parishes are Our Lady of Angels,

St. Francis of Assisi, St. Rita, and St. John Neumann.

Immediate neighbors St. Paul United Methodist Church and Cardinal Montessori School "are eager to support our program," says Christine, adding that St. Paul's pastor spent a day helping move and arrange furniture and the Montessori School sent its students to provide music at the dedication of St. Margaret's.

The Woodbridge-based St. Vincent de Paul Society and American Legion both assisted through furniture donations.

Professional Home Solutions helped by building a toy storage closet in the playroom/laundry room that not only allows for easy storage but also keeps children away from the water heater.

In meeting with social service agencies in the area, Christine says that they have been generous in "describing their program procedures and sharing best practices." She thanks the staff of Prince William County's Department of Social Services, Benedictine BARN Transitional Housing, Dawson Beach Transitional Housing, and ACTS Transitional Housing.

Christine and Case Manager



Saint Margaret's Program Director Christine Neijstrom (left) and Case Worker Nicolette Davis speak to a homeless mother with two children.

Photo by Jeanne Spaeth

Nicolette Davis have personally visited resident neighbors and given them literature describing St. Margaret's program. Some of the neighbors were pleased with the renovation work and said, "You are improving the neighborhood."

Under the in-take process at St. Margaret's, Christine and Nicolette interview homeless families from all areas of the Diocese. A family is asked to have a letter of recommendation from the case manager at the shelter where it currently resides. Once a family has agreed to the residency rules and moves in, it will receive supportive services such as case management, food assistance, and employment and life-skills training.

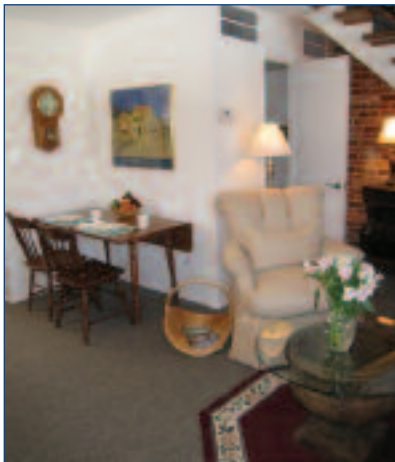
"Our goal is to help the family onto the road to self-sufficiency," says Nicolette.

Asked how people can help, Christine says that there is a real need to help parents find employment. "We would love to partner with local employers who can offer entry-level jobs to our residents," she says. Contributions to help cover childcare costs for working parents are also needed.

Call 703-910-4845 to help.



Renovations of the units at St. Margaret's include new kitchens, flooring, and carpeting as well as painting.



Photos by Jeanne Spaeth