

## 'Love Without Limit' — A Memorial to Sister Gloria

On December 28, The House of Mercy lost an important member of the family.

Sister Gloria had been with the House since 1989, not long after it opened its doors. And over the years she played a key role in fundraising. She baked cookies and cakes for our garage sales. She helped hand out Christmas baskets to thousands of people. She tutored children and adults. She helped people get tax rebates. And she always listened intently to the people who came to the House of Mercy for assistance.

"When Gloria talked to people who came to the House, her heart would go out to them," said her cousin Sister Grace. "If they suffered in any way, she felt it."

"People loved to sit down and talk with her. She made everyone feel important," said Sister Rita. "She had a special way of doing that. In a way, it was like having your own grandmother around."

"She did so many things for The House of Mercy," said C.W. "And everybody loved and respected her. It's a big loss to all of us."

### A life of service to the church. And the poor.

Sister Gloria grew up in a poor Italian neighborhood in Corning. The daughter of Italian immigrants, she was educated in Catholic schools and later studied languages in college, graduating cum laude in the process.

Then she followed her cousins Sister Grace and Father Neil into a life of service to the church. When she became a Sister of Mercy in 1960, a telling phrase was inscribed into the ring she received at the time: "Love without limit."

She also shared with her cousins a deep love of social justice and service to the poor. And she worked with the Diocesan office of Social Ministry in the Southern Tier for a decade before joining The House of Mercy and becoming a key member of our family.



Photo caption/credit here

*"People loved to sit down and talk with her. She made everyone feel important."  
She had a special way of doing that.  
In a way, it was like having your own grandmother around."*

—SISTER RITA—

Her death—which was unexpected—came exactly five years and one day after the loss of Sister Grace's twin brother, Father Neil.

## Here's An Easy Way To Help The Poor & Homeless

Want to make a big difference for some of the poorest people in Rochester? Just visit "The House of Mercy Amazon Wish List" at:

[www.bit.ly/HOMamazon](http://www.bit.ly/HOMamazon)

You can buy items on our top-priority needs list and have them shipped directly to us. It's a fast, easy way to help The House. And it's a great way to provide coats, gloves, sleeping bags, underwear, and other essentials to people who struggle to survive every day.

*We thank you in advance for your generosity.*

"It's a very hard loss for all of us," Sister Grace said. "But I know she's up there with my brother now. And I take comfort in the fact that they will work together and look out for The House of Mercy."

Hundreds of people attended the vigil and mass for Sister Gloria at the chapel of the Sisters of Mercy Motherhouse in Rochester. Some of the residents of The House of Mercy also traveled to Corning for the burial.

Donations can be made in Sister Gloria's honor to her favorite charity, The House of Mercy, 725 Hudson Avenue, Rochester, N.Y. 14621.



*"Give to the poor,  
and you shall have  
treasure in heaven."*

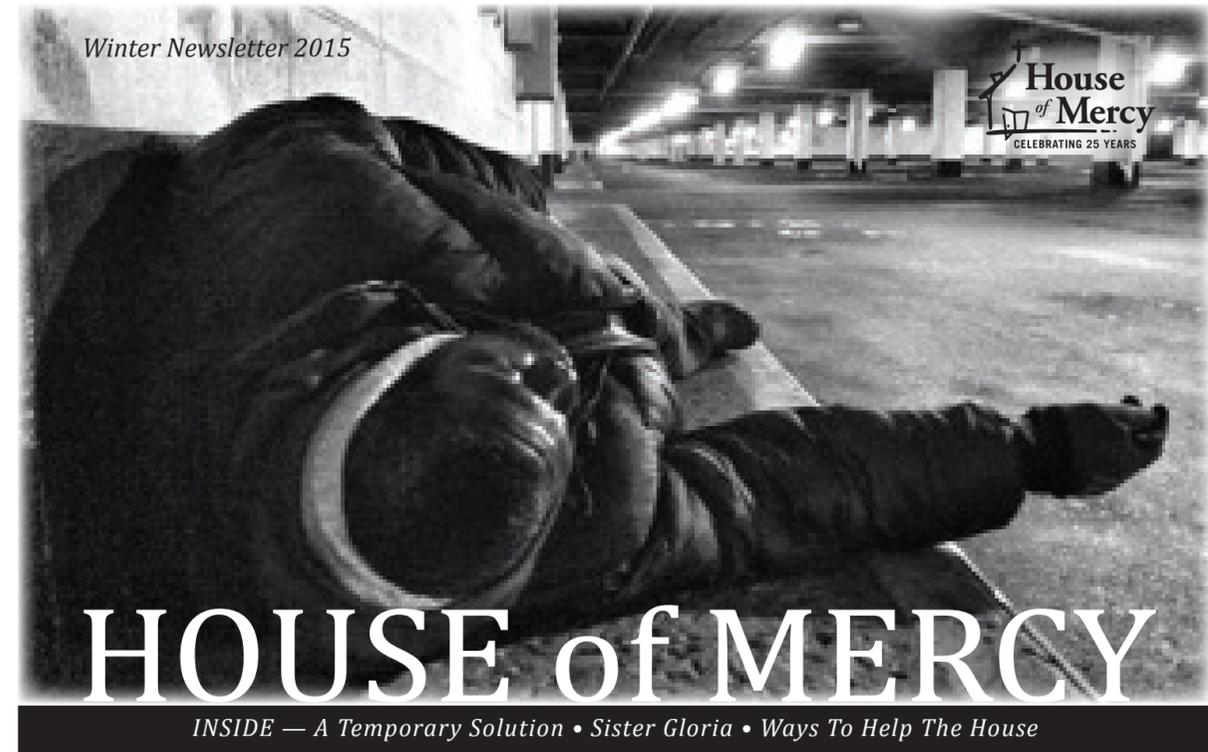
— MATTHEW 19:21 —

## URGENTneeds

### For The House:

- Vol. Administrative Assistant for Sister Grace
- A large truck with a 12-foot box
- Plumbers and carpenters with tools for ongoing projects
- Professionals with expertise in business, finance, construction, real estate development and grant-writing who can assist our Board of Directors
- Donations for much-needed improvements to our home on Hudson Avenue

For more information, call  
(585) 546-2580 or email  
[HOM@HouseofMercy.org](mailto:HOM@HouseofMercy.org).



Winter Newsletter 2015

House of Mercy  
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

HOUSE of MERCY

INSIDE — A Temporary Solution • Sister Gloria • Ways To Help The House

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to many of the poorest people in

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*"Poor people have an equal standing in God's eyes.*

*They are citizens of our community. And they deserve a voice like anyone else."*

# SANCTUARY!

## A Caring Community Finds A Temporary Housing Solution For The Homeless.

*It's one of the most dramatic stories in the history of The House of Mercy.*

There were countless setbacks. Many protests. An arrest. And the unconscionable bulldozing of tents in Sanctuary Village just before Christmas.

But advocates who wanted to create a safe winter refuge for the “hard-to-place” homeless in downtown Rochester persevered. And with help from a leading local developer, countless supporters and The City of Rochester, a temporary shelter opened its doors on January 27.

Homeless men and women who had fallen through a gaping crack in the local safety net finally had a safe, warm place to stay for the rest of the winter.

“I am so happy,” said Sister Grace, one of the leaders of the effort to find a solution. “It was a long, hard fight. But we didn’t give up. And we found a way to protect people whose lives are literally at risk during our hard Rochester winters.

“We have a long way to go to find a permanent solution. But at least we’ve been able to keep people safe and warm until spring.”

### The frustrating search for a ‘Housing First’ solution.

For months, the organization running the garage for Monroe County had planned to evict the homeless who sought shelter there at night. As many as 40 people slept on cardboard and concrete, escaping from the arctic chill.

The garage operators were concerned about sanitary conditions. But they failed to consider the impact of the



Photo caption/credit here

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eventual eviction on homeless people with mental health and substance abuse problems who literally struggle to survive every day.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2014, advocates for the homeless from the House of Mercy, St. Joseph’s House of Hospitality and the Coalition of Concerned Residents of Monroe County tried to get county officials to take responsibility for finding a humanitarian solution.

After all, from a legal standpoint, it is the County’s responsibility to care for the most vulnerable members of our community. But county officials repeatedly took the position that the existing shelters and services available in the community were sufficient.

From Sister Grace’s perspective, however, there was one heart-breaking fact that proved they were wrong. Every night desperate men and women were sleeping in a primitive concrete cavern.

“We felt the clock ticking down,” recalled Sister Grace. “We were heading into fall, and the weather was changing. If we didn’t find a solution, the homeless would be out on the street with winter weather fast approaching.”

### The August ‘surprise.’

In August, Sister Grace went on her annual retreat at Stella Niagara near Lewiston. But while she was there, trying to get some much-needed rest, she learned that the garage operators were proceeding with their eviction plans without any advance warning.

The sudden decision caught advocates for the homeless completely off guard. And Sister Grace left the retreat to hurry back to Rochester for a series of protests. One night Sister Grace and other advocates even slept in the garage, experiencing the many challenges of living there first-hand.

In the following weeks, advocates kept trying to meet with local governmental officials. But meetings were mysteriously canceled. And phone calls were often not returned.

At one point, Sister Grace, Ryan Acuff and Tom Malthaner refused to leave a county office building until they could speak to Kelly Reed, Commissioner of the Department of Human Services.

Reed was not available, and the three were arrested for trespassing. But it did not deter them from protesting a situation that put homeless people in harm’s way. *(Editor’s note: The three eventually received an Acquittal in Contemplation of Dismissal from the judge.)*

### The founding of Sanctuary Village.

To raise public awareness about the unresolved crisis, advocates next built a tent city called Sanctuary Village in Washington Park downtown. At a request from City Hall, the village moved from the park to a place near the Genesee River under the city’s



Photo caption/credit here



Photo caption/credit here

architectural signature: the Douglass-Anthony bridge.

As news spread, church groups and hundreds of volunteers made regular trips to the Village to bring food, clothing, and other essentials to the homeless people living there. It was a remarkable outpouring of community support for a cause that many local government officials had turned their backs on.

But one night in December, a tent caught on fire. And shortly after that, the City moved in with heavy equip-

ment to clear the village. Tents were scooped up with all their contents, dumped into bins with mud and snow, and carted away.

Some of the homeless people at Sanctuary Village lost everything they had, including critical forms of identity like driver’s licenses and social security cards.

“I cried when I found out about it,” Sister Grace said. “I couldn’t believe it. It was two days before Christmas.”

### The Christmas miracle.

The City’s actions caused a community outrage. Thousands of people began monitoring the House’s Facebook page for the latest news. And Ashley Papp, a social media expert and member of the House’s Board of Directors, launched an online fundraising campaign.

In less than 48 hours, hundreds of people throughout the community had donated almost \$20,000. And then an amazing thing happened. A family that had never been involved with the House of Mercy before contacted Sister Grace and wrote out a check for \$60,000.

“There are so many people in this community who care about the homeless and others who are desperately poor,” said Sister Grace. “When we work together, we can keep them from falling through the holes in our local safety net.”

### The hard work begins again.

The temporary shelter will close in the spring of this year. It provides a lifesaving alternative to living on the streets this winter. But it still falls short of a permanent solution.

Sister Grace and other advocates are working hard to develop a permanent Housing First shelter.

*“This is a community problem, It’s not a problem for the House of Mercy to solve. So we need local government officials and community leaders to step forward and lead the way.”*

“It was a miracle,” said Sister Grace. “God was looking out for us. There were tears of joy at that meeting.”

A few weeks later, there was another remarkable act of generosity. Ken Glazier of Buckingham Properties donated the use of a downtown warehouse for a temporary shelter. And this time the City played a key role in turning the offer into a viable solution for the rest of the winter.

While the details for the temporary shelter were finalized, another organization stepped forward. The Downtown United Presbyterian Church offered to provide shelter to the homeless until the Buckingham building was ready.

The temporary shelter officially opened on January 27. The House of Mercy will provide the leadership and funding—more than \$80,000—to operate it for the next few months.

But this is a community problem. And local government officials and community leaders need to take responsibility for finding a suitable building, resolving the zoning issues, and providing the operational funding to keep homeless people safe not just this year, but every year.

“This is a community problem,” said Sister Grace. “It’s not a problem for the House of Mercy to solve. So we need local government officials and community leaders to step forward and lead the way.

“But if others fail to act, we will not turn out backs on people who would be exposed to frostbite, hypothermia and a very real risk of freezing to death.”

The House of Mercy already operates a shelter for the homeless on an around-the-clock basis. We also provide food, clothing, substance abuse counseling, tutoring, burial

assistance and many other services with only two paid full-time staff members and a shoestring budget.

We receive no governmental funding and no organizational funding beyond a few small grants and the United Way’s Donor Option. In fact, most of our budget comes from small donations from thousands of people who believe in our mission.

Thanks to the generosity and dedication of our volunteers, donors and other supporters, we are able to serve as a tireless advocate for the poor and homeless in a city with one of the highest rates of extreme poverty in the country.

When others fail to take action to protect our most vulnerable citizens, the House of Mercy will step forward. And we will do our best to fill the challenging role we have been given: Filling the gaps in the official safety net in Rochester and Monroe County.

Our involvement in Sanctuary Village and the humanitarian crisis involving the ‘hard-to-place’ homeless downtown is the latest example of this important part of our mission.

• **Help the homeless.** The House of Mercy is now helping more homeless and poor people than ever before. So support our life-saving mission. Send your donation to The House of Mercy, 725 Hudson Avenue, Rochester, N.Y. today.

• **Stay tuned.** For the latest news on our efforts to help the homeless in Rochester, visit our facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/house-ofmercyrochester>.

