



## OUR HISTORY

House of Mercy began not as a building, but as a calling.

In 1985, fierce, faithful, and unstoppable Sister Grace Miller answered that call. Alongside Sister Rita Lewis and C.W. Earlsey, her earliest allies and soul siblings in this work, she opened a small house on Central Park for Rochester's unhoused.

Word spread. The doors barely closed again.



*Sister Grace Miller*



*Sister Rita Lewis*

For decades, the trio served from Hudson Avenue, where every hallway told a story of survival. They created more than shelter; they built a community stitched together with resilience and grace, inspiring hope in the face of adversity. But the space sagged under the weight of so much need. Duct tape held walls. Love held everything else.

In 2016, a miracle had a street address: 285 Ormond. A homeless man named James Rhen, devoted to the Sisters, searched online and discovered the building. It was big, affordable (barely), and zoned just right.

Still, the idea seemed impossible until one donor stepped forward and said, "I'm going to buy that building for House of Mercy." Another miracle followed, and then another.

Volunteers, architects, city officials, and shelter guests came together, each playing a crucial role in the journey of House of Mercy. They stripped and rebuilt the place, not just with materials but with intention: beds instead of couches, a sanctuary for quiet reflection, a dignified intake desk, and a dining room that looked like a restaurant.

Before the doors even opened, people were coming- walking from every direction, drawn by something unshakable.



*C.W. Earlsey*

On move-in day, C.W. worried everything might go wrong. Instead, everything went right. “This is like a hotel,” someone whispered. “I’m going to change my life around,” someone else promised. And when Sister Grace finally stepped inside, she saw joy on every face and hope at every turn.

The move to 285 Ormond wasn’t just a relocation; it was a spiritual handoff. The new space carried the soul of Hudson Avenue and lifted it higher. It became clear that this had always been the plan. The building was waiting.

Today, we still feel their footsteps: Sister Grace, Sister Rita, and C.W., guiding us as we honor their vision.



As we seek new partnerships, renovate our space, and rise to meet the future, we are not starting something new. We are continuing what was destined, ensuring the mission of House of Mercy endures.

285 Ormond is our home, and it always was.