

City mission taking flight

Waves of generosity lift church – and the needy



SHAWN DOWD staff photographer

Ed Bonner of Fairport, pastor of Perinton Presbyterian, left, jokes with church members Midge and Carl Englund of Fairport and Barbara Pettis of Perinton as they renovate an apartment for Joy Community Church in Rochester.

The plaque outside a second-floor apartment in the North Goodman Street building hints at the flood of generosity that Joy Community Church has experienced lately. It reads, "True Servants," an homage to the volunteers who have given their time and money to a mission Joy Community's pastor describes as bigger than any church.

It's certainly bigger, physically speaking, than the church itself, which is at 890 N. Goodman. In fact, it takes up the rest of the block.

The large, multiuse building next door to the church – once home to a pizza parlor, bar and sandwich shop – is where the Rev. Tony Martorana and his congregation want to establish a one-stop shop for needy neighborhood residents. It would include a food and clothing pantry, an ice cream and coffee shop, a medical clinic, counseling services, technology training center and temporary living quarters.

Just five months ago, those things existed only in theory, and in the digitized renderings playing on a flat-screen TV outside the church sanctuary. Then several suburban congregations got word of Joy Community's idea – and the race was on.

Fairport's First Congregational United Church of Christ offered to renovate one of the apartments upstairs. Perinton Presbyterian Church took over renovation of another. Salmon Creek Community Church in Scottsville got involved. And Abundant Rain Christian Fellowship volunteered to fix up the technology center.

Their contributions have amounted to as much as \$100,000 in labor and materials, Martorana estimated. He described the windfall as surprising and unique, given the cooperation of so many people of different denominations.

"It's so refreshing," he said. "I'm so encouraged by it."

Now, drywall, ceiling lights and new floors grace the food pantry. Containers of juice, salad dressing and canned goods line wooden shelves. The medical clinic has been framed out, and the apartment renovated by volunteers from First Congregational features all kinds of homey touches, from curtains to soap.

First Congregational last year worked with the Pines of Perinton, a low-income housing complex in Fairport, to create a youth center, for which it raised \$14,000. This year, upon learning of Joy Community's mission, "we said, 'Look, this looks like a good project for us to hook in with,'" said Pastor John Cedarleaf.

"The health of the city is important for people who may not live in the city, and so we wanted to reach across boundaries and work with people who are doing a hands-on ministry, as they're doing in that area," he said. The congregation raised \$12,000 toward that end, and installed a new furnace, in addition to overhauling the apartment and outfitting it with donated appliances.

Edward Bonner, associate pastor of Perinton Presbyterian, said his congregation found Joy Community's idea "such a compelling vision" that they found it easy to mobilize their people and resources to help.

"This is a type of vision that really captures people's hearts and minds. They want to get involved," he said. "There's already a lift to the community, and a sense that things are heading in the right direction there."

Joy Community's own congregation – which has invested in the area through the purchase of property, renovation of its church building, hosting of community events such as "movie night" and organization of weekly free food distribution – also has given generously to support the renovations. The church plans to set up an outdoor café, where ice cream will be served after services on Saturdays. Eventually, the food pantry will be outfitted with a computer system to allow volunteers to keep track of clients and match them with other services they might need.

Martorana hopes the churches that have rallied around his church will continue to act as partners, taking over shifts at the coffee shop, for example, where they would offer fellowship along with beverages. Cedarleaf said he planned to meet with Martorana this week to discuss just that.

In the meantime, Martorana continues his appeal for donations of all kinds to complete the building renovations and support the services to be offered inside. So far, his prayers have been answered.

"We have just been praying, 'How could we possibly do this?'" he said. "And God keeps surprising us."

[Lara Becker Liu](#), *Rochester Democrat & Chronicle*, May 10, 2007



How you can help

For information about how to donate time, services, money, food and other items, call Joy Community Church, 890 N. Goodman St. at (585) 288-0863 or go to www.joycom.org.