

Co-operative Apartment for Unemployed Women Has Its Start in Parish

By Dorothy Day

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Summary: Heralds the opening of a co-operative apartment for ten homeless women and pleads with readers for donations of beds, blankets and sheets. (DDLW #276).

Although it cannot be dignified by the name of House of Hospitality, what is virtually a center of hospitality is opening today, December 11, in the parish of the Immaculate Conception Church.

It is called the Teresa Joseph Co-operative, and it is an apartment which will house ten homeless women who have been staying at shelters provided by the city, the Salvation Army, and other organizations.

It is named after the older St. Teresa because she was forced to find shelter for her nuns when she was setting up her new foundations. St. Teresa herself said that one of the reasons for the disintegration of the Carmelites was that the convents had become so poor that the nuns, though enclosed, received callers constantly in order that they might get food from outside. One of her first thoughts always was for the material well-being of her nuns as a foundation for spiritual life.

And it was St. Joseph upon whom she always depended to look after her houses. He had had to provide both house and food for the blessed Virgin and Child. And he is the one we, too, must appeal to for aid in this venture for Catholic unemployed.

With the co-operation of the priests of the parish, donations were collected from young working women and married women of the neighborhood to provide for the shelter of their less fortunate sisters. Thirty-five dollars was brought in by Father Stephen Seccor and by Father John Nicholas which they had collected from interested young women who pledged themselves to continue their aid monthly in order that the rent, gas, electricity and laundry of the house might be taken care of. THE CATHOLIC WORKER received fifteen dollars more, ten dollars from a priest to be used "in any charitable work," and the other from a sorrowing husband who from the bedside of his dying wife sent this donation as one he knew she would be glad to make for the opening up of a home for single unemployed Catholic women.

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To those who are discouraged at the vastness of the work to be done, and the slightness of the work accomplished, we wish to call attention to the fact that if fifty parishes or schools or organizations would enter on a similar work, five hundred women would be taken care of before the winter is out! And it can

all be done with the fifty-cent regularly-made donations of working girls and married women themselves.

It is not really a “house” that we are opening up, but an apartment in this central neighborhood, steam heated and with a good big bath, six large rooms, five of which can be used as bedrooms, one of them a dormitory holding four beds. The rent is fifty dollars a month.

The kitchen is large enough to be used as a small sitting room.

Peter Maurin started the work with his constant propaganda for more hospitality among Catholics. The unemployed single women who came into the office to tell of their need for a Catholic place of shelter provided the immediate cause. And Father Nicholas and Father Seccor with their ready co-operation and courage completed the work which could not have gotten under way without the co-operation of the priests.

So far three beds are all that have been obtained, although ten are needed. We also have four blankets, two of them donated by a woman whose family are unemployed save for one son who is working for ten dollars a week. She washed the blankets herself and sent them down to the office with prayers for the success of the new venture.

Another woman, unable to afford to buy things herself, canvassed among her friends until she found one who voluntarily bought ten sheets, towels and pillow slips.

We have mentioned in another place in this issue how another friend sent in the first contribution in the way of two sheets. Another woman sent drapes, a blanket and sheets, and she is the mother of a large family who could well use them herself.

There is no one no matter how poor who cannot do something for us, so we do not hesitate to ask our New York and Brooklyn readers to call the office if they are able to donate sheets, blankets, towels, pillows, or if they wish to make a donation of money to buy any of those things.

Today we are taking CATHOLIC WORKER money to buy more beds from a rooming house which is being disbanded. We spent some time looking around for some without success, for people don't keep such cumbersome things if they are not in use.

The winter is on us and we can wait no longer and beds we must have. We will borrow blankets for the time being and use those of the editors. They can roll themselves in coats and newspapers, which are said to be warm, though we are sure they are very noisy.

However, we hug to ourselves the assurance that “all these things” such as blankets “will be added unto us,” so we are not dismayed. Come to think of it, there are two rugs on THE CATHOLIC WORKER floor, which, if energetically beaten out, will serve as covers.

Christ's first bed was of straw.