



FOUNDER RETURNS TO LEAD BETHESDA PROJECT

Bethesda Project, a major provider of services to the homeless of Philadelphia, has named a new Executive Director – well, sort of. Fr. Domenic Rossi, founder and first Executive Director of Bethesda Project – from 1979 through 1997 – will return to the leadership of this highly successful organization. Effective July 1, 2010, he will replace the retiring Angelo Sgro who has served in that position for the past ten years.

Rev. Domenic Rossi founded Bethesda Project, with the help of members of a prayer group at Daylesford Abbey, in 1979. Father Rossi and friends were responding to the significant message of the prophet Isaiah that to truly please God you must “share your bread with the hungry, shelter the oppressed and the homeless.” This inspiration coincided with a request from Sister Mary Klock of Mercy Hospice that the group take in and support, on a long-term basis, the still vulnerable graduates of their women’s shelter at 13th and Pine.

In 1982, after several years operating in a rented facility, Bethesda Project purchased and renovated its first permanent home for 16 formerly homeless women at 11th and Spruce Street and the rest, as they say, is history. Over the next 9 years Bethesda Project, under the leadership of Father Rossi, developed and opened five more facilities and ran two Church Shelter programs becoming a leading provider of housing and shelter services to the homeless. This was all accomplished at a time when there were far fewer resources available for the development of affordable housing for the poor than there is today.

In 1991 Father Rossi was reassigned by his Norbertine Order to lead a parish in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Father Rossi returned to the east coast in 1997 to become pastor of St. Norbert Parish in Paoli, PA. His leadership at St. Norbert’s resulted in a dramatic increase in membership at the main line parish with a vibrant community of worshipers that has become a major supporter of the work of Bethesda Project, both financially and in providing a tremendous corps of volunteers. It was obvious to all that Fr. Rossi never lost his commitment to the homeless and his parishioners were eager to follow his lead.

Father Domenic will return to lead an organization that continued to grow under Angelo Sgro’s leadership. Since March of 2000, Bethesda Project’s staff and budget have more than doubled while adding programs for the homeless including Our Brothers’ Place Shelter, two winter time Café’s, the Brother’s Keeper Program, and Connelly House(in partnership with Project H.O.M.E.) Bethesda Project now serves over 3000 different homeless and formerly homeless men and women each year in 18 facilities of various sizes and programs.

“It gives me great comfort to know that I am leaving Bethesda Project in the capable hands of Domenic Rossi. Bethesda Project exists, in large measure, due to the vision, competence and tenacity of Father Domenic. His return to the helm will be good for the homeless men and women we serve and good for Bethesda Project.”