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ADRIAN DOMINICAN SISTERS

January 2007 • Volume 1, Issue 1

## Providing Affordable Housing in Baltimore Through the St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center

Did you know those signs that say “We Buy Houses” are strategically placed throughout major metropolitan areas to intimidate homeowners into selling their property? By creating an atmosphere of fear and loss, homeowners are often cheated out of their lifetime investments. This is just one of the issues I learned about when I visited St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center (SAHAC) in Baltimore, Maryland. SAHAC is one of the projects supported by the Adrian Dominican Sisters through the Portfolio Advisory Board’s Community Investment Fund. The mission of SAHAC is “... to create and maintain equal housing opportunities with low- and moderate-income people, primarily in Baltimore City, and to encourage and support strong and diverse neighborhoods.”

**The temple stands unfinished until all are housed in dignity.**

The Adrian Dominican Sisters can truly be proud of their long-term partnership with the St. Ambrose projects. The Congregation was one of the first investors to commit to St. Ambrose as it began seeking financial assistance. The Housing Aid

Center was founded in 1968 by a Jesuit seminarian with a vision and determination to make a difference by addressing the housing needs of first-time homeowners. Ninety percent of SAHAC clients are persons of color and 70 percent are single-parent families. When one meets Vincent (Vin) Quayle, the founder and executive director, and the staff of 33, there is no doubt that SAHAC is more than a job. St. Ambrose is a ministry of service to marginalized people. Vin projects a welcome acceptance of each person who enters SAHAC’s doors. A word, a pat on the shoulder or a shared cup of coffee convinces clients they have found a home at St. Ambrose and are on the way to home ownership or preservation.

St. Ambrose provides housing assistance to more than 3,000 families each year through a continuum of programs. One such project is the Homesharing Program.

Counselors match people living alone who need extra income or help around the house (such as the elderly) with compatible housemates who need an affordable place to live. Homeshare arrangements are tailored to meet each individual situation, and cross cultural, gender, religious and generational boundaries. They protect home ownership for the elderly and provide a home for those who find themselves without a place to live. Reasonable rent, help around the house, similar household expectations, a large dose of companionship and security for each participant does seem to create a home! At the same time, every safeguard is in place to protect against exploitation of the sharers engaged in this “extended family” commitment.

St. Ambrose also purchases abandoned or fore-closed homes at 50 percent to 75 percent below the assessed property value and uses the capital to renovate the homes to sell to qualified first-time homeowners. This is one aspect of the Baltimore/St. Ambrose “Healthy Neighborhoods” project to stabilize communities and provide full-time work for local contractors as they endeavor to reduce homelessness one family at a time.

A final cup of coffee with Vin allowed the opportunity for questions and much deserved praise for the organization. A framed poster on the conference room wall truly mirrors the message and mission of St. Ambrose Housing Aid Center: “The temple stands unfinished until all are housed in dignity.”

– Susan Van Baalen, OP

*“We live right relationships with Earth Community.”*

– General Chapter ‘04

**We want to hear your thoughts about our newsletters.**

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