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Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (WI)

House of Peace hopes for holiday expansion

Ministry outreach needs \$250,000 by February

TOM HEINEN Staff Milwaukee Journal Sentinel
Published: November 25, 2006

With an image of the late Brother Booker T. Ashe still on an exterior mural, the **House of Peace** needs to raise about \$250,000 by February if a major building project that will carry on his spirit of service to the poor is to be completed before the 2007 holidays. Having just distributed some 1,200 Thanksgiving food boxes, volunteers and staff members were stacking Christmas boxes of non-perishable food in the chapel Friday morning. They were trying to make enough space in a multipurpose room for members of St. Francis Borgia Parish in Cedarburg to host 110 needy families for "Breakfast With Baby Jesus" early in December.

Another staff member was preparing for the needy to come Friday afternoon to an inadequately heated garage behind the main building for used clothing that is sorted, stored and distributed there.

Meanwhile, a few children's toys sat in pre-chaos quiet in a basement room. Those toys are the vanguard of what will become an overflowing, office-cluttering invasion of gifts for nearly 2,250 children.

Those and other ministries will change if a \$4 million fund drive that the center launched in May succeeds. Of that, \$1 million is to support programming and \$3 million is earmarked for an expansion and renovation that will slightly more than double the size of the ministry's center, at 1702 W. Walnut St.

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The low-key campaign, titled "Help us make room . . . for hope," has raised about \$1.25 million, including a \$100,000 bequest that sparked the campaign's planning 3 1/2 years ago, said Brother Mark Carrico, executive director of the **House of Peace**, a Capuchin Franciscan ministry.

If ground can be broken for the 13,900-square-foot expansion within the first couple months of 2007, the work can be completed in time for what Carrico calls the chaos of activity that surrounds Thanksgiving and Christmas.

But construction won't start until half of the \$3 million cost is raised, and so far the campaign is about \$250,000 short of that \$1.5 million target. Starting before the entire amount is raised is possible partly because financial responsibility is carried by the Province of St. Joseph of the Capuchin Order Inc., which owns and operates the ministry.

Carrico, executive director since May 2003, is hopeful.

That was a hallmark of Ashe, who co-founded the **House of Peace** in a storefront at 1835 W. Walnut St. with Father Matthew Gottschalk as an outreach of St. Francis Parish in early 1968. At the time, racial tensions were high and the area had been racked by civil disturbances the previous summer.

A few years later, the ministry bought a brick building at its present location. The ministry expanded twice over the decades as it survived a fire and a semitrailer truck that crashed into the chapel and injured volunteers preparing Christmas packages.

A visible leader

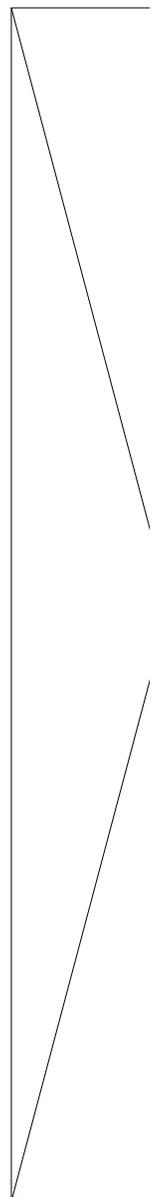
Gottschalk worked quietly behind the scenes. Ashe, a cousin of tennis star Arthur Ashe, served as the director and public spokesman for more than 25 years. Ashe had a gregarious nature and charismatic spirit that attracted attention to the **House of Peace** throughout the archdiocese. Ashe was relieved of his duties in 1995 after suffering serious health problems and died on Christmas Eve in 2000.

Today, the center annually receives contributions from about 2,350 people to help support an operating budget of about \$510,000, Carrico said. Foundations, corporate donors, Catholic parishes and churches of other denominations also contribute.

A campaign video quotes Milwaukee Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan as saying, "You know, one of the great saints that I love and that the whole church loves — and heck, that the whole world loves — is St. Francis of Assisi. And I often hear people say, 'Why can't we have a Francis of Assisi today?' Where are the Francises today? . . . Go to the **House of Peace**." (For the video, go to www.thecapuchins.org, click on "NEWS" and then "News Clips.")

Gerri Sheets-Howard, assistant director of the **House of Peace**, also adds a strong voice to the video. She recalls her family getting assistance at the center when she was growing up.

"I believe it's important that children be properly dressed when they go to school, because then they're not teased, then their focus can be on learning," says Sheets-Howard, who received a master's degree in religious studies from Cardinal Stritch University this year. "And I believe that's what happened to



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me. Because I had a love for school, because I had proper clothing, because I was nourished properly, I learned."

The expansion is needed not so much to meet the community's growing needs as to improve the quality of what is offered, Carrico said.

On any day, it is challenging for people in wheelchairs or who otherwise cannot use stairs to come to the center. There are no handicapped-accessible washrooms. And there is no elevator to get to the basement for services that include a nursing clinic run by nurses and students from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and for legal assistance provided by Marquette University Law School students in the presence of practicing attorneys who are Marquette alumni.

"One time I had to carry a woman down the stairs for a breast cancer support group meeting," Carrico recalled. "She was in great pain. She was so insistent about going to that meeting. Her courage was just incredible."

The building project includes an elevator; accessible restrooms; a place in the main building to sort and distribute clothing; expanded space and more refrigeration for the center's food pantry; and more space for community groups and other outside organizations to use for meetings and activities.

Looking ahead, Carrico would love to be able to use the expanded space to offer high school equivalency training, expand a teen leadership program and to offer college and technical college classes.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Go to www.houseofpeacemilwaukee.org, contact executive director Brother Mark Carrico via e-mail at markdcarrico@juno.com, or call (414) 933-1300 on weekdays.

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