

Old house gets new life through Matthew 25 group

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By William T. Clew

Despite last weekend's storm which left as much as 15 inches of heavy, wet snow in Worcester, Matthew 25, an organization that provides rental housing for families in need, held open house from 1 to 3 p.m. Sunday at its newest acquisition and renovation project at 96 Chatham St. According to Jesuit Father Frederick Enman, Worcester native and executive director of Matthew 25, about 25 people attended the ceremony, which began after the snowfall had ended. He estimated that about 50 would have attended if the storm had not occurred.

Another complication, he said was the fact that a house at the top of Chatham Street, which is one way, had a gas leak. The street was blocked by a fire engine, a rescue truck and an ambulance, so those who attended had to find other places to park and walk to the open house.

He said the house is called the Louise and Fred Enman House in honor of Father Enman's parents. He said he expects that the family of four, chosen after screening by the Matthew 25 board, will move in by next week after inspections of the renovation work are completed.

Father Enman said the house on Chatham Street is the ninth in Worcester renovated by Matthew 25. Though many homes and businesses in Worcester and surrounding towns lost electrical power in last weekend's storm, not one of the Matthew 25 homes lost power, he said.

The two-family house has a three-bedroom unit on the first floor and a two-bedroom unit on the second floor. The family will rent the first floor, Father Enman said.

The house was sold to Matthew 25 by a board member, John P. Luring. According to Father Enman, the house belonged to Mr. Luring's father, who rented it inexpensively to a group of Franciscan Sisters Minor. After the Sisters moved from Worcester, Mr. Luring offered the house to Matthew 25 for \$60,000.

Father Enman said in a letter announcing the open house that Mr. Luring estimated the value of the house at \$120,000, the city assesses the house at \$175,000 and "our insurance company estimates the replacement value at \$300,000."

He said Matthew 25 made a down -payment of \$5,000 and has borrowed the rest of the money, to be paid in five years. He said the rent will be \$1,000 a month. The family will pay one third of their income in rent. The rest will be paid by the Worcester Housing Authority with federal funds

from the Section 8 program. Matthew 25 has raised \$53,500 to secure the loan.

In his letter, Father Enman said, “Whenever a family member or a friend give me a gift for Matthew 25 when I preside at a wedding or baptism, I have been putting that gift in a special fund to honor my parents. This past summer I told my Matthew 25 board of directors that I had \$13,500 in this fund and that I would like to use it to purchase 96 Chatham St.

“As we had no other available resources they wisely decided NO. I applied for a grant from the Stoddard Trust and received a generous check for \$20,000. We were now up to \$33,500. I re-presented to the board. They wisely decided NO.

“I applied for a grant from the Fletcher Foundation and received a generous check for \$20,000. We were now up to \$53,500. I presented to the board a third time. They wisely decided YES.”

Father Enman said Christopher Burke, Worcester area director of Matthew 25, is coordinating the work on the house and does carpentry work along with Chris Phillips. Jeffrey Fenuccio and Dave Siebold did plumbing and electrical work. Student volunteers from St. John’s High School in Shrewsbury did landscaping work, Mr. Burke said.

After the work is complete, gas lines installed and all inspections are completed the family will be able to move in. Father Enman said he expected that the house will be ready in a few days.

The upstairs unit will be rented when work there is finished.

Father Enman said the house has historical significance, being part of the Crown Hill neighborhood and Matthew 25 contacted the Worcester Historical Commission when it wanted to remove a rotted back porch from the building. Since the porch was not a part of the original building, there was no problem getting approval to remove it, he said.

In his letter, Father Enman lauded Mr. Burke “as a talented construction supervisor and carpenter. He has been coordinating the electrical and plumbing upgrades on the property and participating fully in the carpentry work. My father was not only a trailer truck driver but a very capable handyman who did all sorts of carpentry, electrical and plumbing jobs for family and friends during his lifetime and I am sure he would approve!

“My mother was a real sweetheart and with her accounting background from Becker College managed the finances of our household and I am sure she would applaud the generous offer of Mr. Luring, the financial smarts of my board and the reasonable charges of our tradesmen working to improve the property.”

Father Enman, assistant dean of students and chaplain of the Boston College School of Law, said he works at the college three days and for Matthew 25 for two days a week. He said Matthew 25 has completed nine houses in Worcester and one in the Dorchester section of Boston.

According to its website, “The mission of Matthew 25 Ministries is to fulfill Matthew 25:34-40 by providing nutritional food to the hungry, clean water to the thirsty, clothing to the naked, shelter to the homeless, medical care to the ill, and humanitarian supplies to prisoners.

““As you did it to the least of these my brothers and sisters, you did it to me’ (Matthew 25:40).”

<http://www.catholicfreepress.org/lead-story-3/2011/11/03/old-house-gets-new-life-through-matthew-25-group/>