

Gerard Place Founder Has Passion for Helping the Poor

Concetta DeFelice OSF has a tremendous passion for helping the poor. Currently board president, Sr. Concetta has always been at Gerard Place. First as a founder along with other LCWR women religious and then as a volunteer at the front desk, education program, food distribution and daycare.

“I interacted with the clients, asked them about their days, and encouraged them - they just need so much encouragement,” Sister Concetta said.

Born in East Bethany in Genesee County, she grew up on a farm with her six brothers and knew what it was like to be poor. From the age of five, she wanted to be a religious sister and a teacher.



After teaching at an affluent grammar school in San Antonio, she came back to Western New York in 1966, made her final vows as a Franciscan Sister in 1967, and was placed at Immaculate Heart of Mary School on Edison Street in East Buffalo near Gerard Place. She eventually served as principal. The contrast between the two schools was stark. Some children in San Antonio had nannies. Many children’s basic needs were often unmet in Buffalo.

“Students came from two housing projects and were extremely poor. Every Tuesday, I would go to a home and visit a family to learn about their needs and struggles. Many of these children came from single family homes,” Sister Concetta said.

Her experience with the residents of East Buffalo was helpful when planning began for Gerard Place in 1988. In addition to teaching, Sister Concetta also served in leadership positions for the Franciscan Missionary Sisters of the divine child (FMDC) – her former congregation before merging and the union of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities. Despite her busy schedule, she always made time for Gerard Place.

“I was thrilled to help, knowing how poor the children were and how single families were struggling,” she said. “When Gerard Place opened and as services expanded over the years, I tried to do as much as much as I could. I couldn’t be over there enough.”

It was an exciting time for Sister Concetta and her fellow “dreamers” as they developed plans, raised funds, watched the apartment construction, and welcomed the first families to live at Gerard Place. Her favorite past time was working in the daycare with the babies and reading to the four-year-olds.

Sister Concetta is amazed at the full range and growing services now offered on site including culinary classes, GED program, workforce development, food pantry, daycare, weekly hot meals distributed to hundreds of neighbors, and many more services too lengthy to mention. She credits David Zapfel, President and CEO, for his passion for the poor and vision for community collaborations and program expansion.

“Following the massacre at Tops on Jefferson, people began to be aware that the East Side is a food desert,” she said. “However, the area is a desert in many other ways. I am so proud that Gerard Place is a beacon of hope for our East Side brothers and sisters.”