FOR MORE THAN 20 YEARS, the Respect Life Office of the Archdiocese of Newark has offered retreats to heal the emotional and spiritual wounds of abortion. But, we felt we needed to do even more. We can’t stand outside an abortion clinic and counsel a woman to keep her baby without offering her the help she needs. The same goes for individuals who are dealing with addictions or are in an abusive relationship. To overcome these obstacles, it takes long-term support. That’s where the newly created Mercy House comes in.
During the Year of Mercy (Dec. 8, 2015-Nov. 20, 2016), Pope Francis asked Catholic dioceses around the world to set up a permanent memorial of the year. This request excited my assistant Patricia Decker and me as we had a vision of creating a space to foster a supportive relationship with our neighbors in need, to provide a channel of love and resources to people facing challenging situations. We shared this vision with Vicar General Rev. Msgr. Thomas Nydegger and Steve Belloise, the executive director of the Office of Property Management. Steve guided us through the process of selecting a suitable location and helped craft our proposal for Msgr. Nydegger, who presented it to Cardinal Joseph Tobin. We were delighted when the cardinal graciously approved the idea in January 2018.

Mercy House will be located at Blessed Sacrament Parish Convent at 620 Clinton Ave. in Newark. Its goal is to create a comfortable environment in which to meet people and provide material resources that will allow them to keep their babies and care for their families. Forming this type of supportive relationship, we hope, will encourage them to participate in our healing ministries, such as Rachel’s Vineyard and Grief to Grace. These healing programs are critical in breaking the existing cycle of behaviors many find themselves caught in.

The community recently lost a great resource with the closing of Birthright, an unplanned pregnancy support center that operated for 35 years in Bloomfield. We hope the addition of Mercy House will help continue their work. And we’re excited that the team of dedicated volunteers from Birthright has expressed an eagerness to join us in this new endeavor.

We’re finding so many selfless people wanting to help bring this mission to reality. We were overwhelmed when a group of about 20 men and women—the self-proclaimed “Mercy Maids”—enthusiastically gathered on a Saturday morning to help with some much needed sprucing up in the former convent. The group cleaned and polished the rooms, as well as installed new ceiling tiles, varnished the floors and prepared walls for painting.

Mercy House will certainly provide many future volunteer opportunities—we can’t do it alone. We welcome involvement from our entire archdiocesan community. We are hoping youth groups, schools and parishes will collaborate by gathering donated items and give time to help organize and manage operations at the center.

We are also looking for professionals willing to donate their time to run a workshop or a support group such as child nutrition classes, 12-step programs, domestic violence abuse, anger management, spiritual guidance, resume writing and job search etiquette, as well as fundraising ideas to provide these programs.

It’s our hope that any person who comes through the doors of Mercy House will have their dignity reaffirmed and feel the love of the Father who cares for each of us. We ask you to pray for this mission to unfold with God’s grace and direction.

If you feel you are being called to walk with us on this journey, please contact the Respect Life Office at 973-497-4350 or email cheryl.riley@rcan.org.

CHERYL RILEY is the associate director of the Respect Life Office.

POPE FRANCIS, homily for first vespers for Divine Mercy Sunday on April 11, 2015

“...This is the time for mercy. It is the favorable time to heal wounds, a time not to be weary of meeting all those who are waiting to see and to touch with their hands the signs of the closeness of God, a time to offer everyone, everyone, the way of forgiveness and reconciliation.”

1. Inside Mercy House—floors and walls being prepped.
2. Exterior of Mercy House—the convent at Blessed Sacrament Parish in Newark.
3. Boxes and bags of donations for the new facility.