

# Center will teach women life skills

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## **Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier**

ROCHESTER -- On March 1, the School Sisters of Notre Dame will open Notre Dame Learning Center for low-income women and their children. The ministry will be located on the third floor of the Charles Settlement House building at 71 Parkway St.

Charles Settlement House, a private agency, provides a variety of social services to citizens of northwestern Rochester, and was originally founded by the Diocese of Rochester in 1917. School Sister of Notre Dame Lorraine Burns, the center's coordinator, said the ministry moved into its rented space in the house Jan. 5.

Prior to establishing the center, Sister Burns was principal of Holy Family School on Jay Street. She retired from that position in June 2003.

In June 2004, Sister Burns will be assisted at the center by a full-time staff member, School Sister of Notre Dame Mary Lou Brien. A remedial math and reading teacher at St. Joseph's School in Penfield, Sister Brien will leave her position and join Sister Burns.

The two nuns said the center grew out of their congregation's desire to respond to the needs of the poor in the city. The sisters surveyed city pastors and social-ministry program directors -- including officials at Catholic Family Center -- about needs they believed were not being met in the city. They concluded that low-income women could use a learning center.

"Some of them need basic nutrition, banking, budgeting and parenting skills as well as learning how to advocate for their children in the school system," Sister Burns said.

The Notre Dame Learning Center will be open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays, she said, and offers such free services as education in basic life skills; English as a second language; and educational tutoring for both women and children. Sister Burns said she already has two people hoping to be tutored when the center opens. She noted that the area around the center is home to many immigrants who need not only language instruction but additional help with such tasks as shopping.

Sister Burns added that she is currently looking for volunteer tutors in various subjects and people who can help her write grants. Those interested may call Sister Burns at 585/254-5110, or e-mail her at [notredamelc@bluefrog.com](mailto:notredamelc@bluefrog.com). The center is also seeking donations of monetary and material aid, she said.

The center has been funded with a \$20,000 start-up grant by the School Sisters of Notre Dame, but eventually must become financially independent, Sister Burns said. To that end, the center is cultivating relationships with various parishes and individual donors, and has already received a tithing grant from St. Mary's downtown, she said. Additionally, Sister Burns said, senior citizens served through Charles Settlement House have already offered to do volunteer work for her.

Both nuns expressed excitement over the new center.

"Now that I'm an old sister, I'm getting to start something new," said Sister Burns, 73. "I've always been a person that likes to do things for other people."

Sister Brien said that she has enjoyed teaching in the suburbs, but wants to work in the inner city as she has done before.

"I guess I just want to be back in the city with the children and the poor," she said.

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