



## **Sister Rosemary Mackie**

### **Ministry of Bishop Sheen Housing**

The 1975 encyclical from the Catholic bishops of the United States affirms the right to a decent home for all people. As a member of the Congregation, I have never lacked for decent housing. But in my 24 years in the Bishop Sheen Housing ministry I have seen first hand despair, fear, poverty and ill housed persons right in our midst. Poverty brings with it substandard housing, poor or no health care, little ability to achieve a living wage, inadequate education, violence and abuse. I grapple with the overwhelming hopelessness of so many women, children, seniors, families and persons living with disabilities. Families often make frantic phone calls only to discover that they are not eligible for assistance or there are no funds. For many families, Bishop Sheen Housing is their last resort.

Housing matters! Housing has a ripple effect. It can move you forward or backward based solely on the quality of your housing. It spills over to other issues like health care, education, and job opportunities. What is worrisome in my present ministry is how easily one becomes vulnerable. Lower income families, seniors and persons with disabilities increasingly face bad outcomes because they lack the resources, community support, and housing stability that we take for granted.

My ministry at Bishop Sheen Housing not only allows me to engage in rehabilitation of homes but in the rebuilding of so many lives. I have an ideal opportunity to create healthier homes for families, seniors and people with disabilities. By making simple and often cost effective home modifications, we eliminate exposure to the source of health and safety related housing hazards. We make every effort to eliminate substandard, inadequate housing and substantially improve the quality of life for the family. We have the opportunity and privilege to leverage partnerships, relationships and additional resources to rehab, rebuild and reinvest in our community.

Fortunately we can eliminate housing conditions that adversely affect the life, health and safety of the family, such as contaminated water supplies, unsanitary septic systems,

unsafe heating, plumbing and electrical systems or conditions that cause accidents, such as unsafe stairs and areas of egress, or environmental hazards that cause mold or lead poisoning. We also provide home modifications so seniors and persons living with disabilities remain independent and secure in their home.

This prevents transience, homelessness, medical emergencies, and many hospitalizations. The end product is the achievement of safe, decent, affordable housing for families, seniors and persons with disabilities. But the housing ripple effect goes far beyond. This includes a reduction in chronic health disorders, illness, learning disabilities; improvement in physical, behavioral and social functioning; reduction in exposure to environmental contaminants; job opportunities and an investment into our communities. And we have seen this ripple effect go further still. By decreasing the families' housing cost burden we create a "nest egg" for lower income families, through energy efficiency improvements and lower insurance costs, as well as retention and creation of construction and supplier jobs.

Currently the SSJ Congregation supports this work through the prayer ministry and the Sisters of St. Joseph Ministry Foundation. The Foundation's crucial financial support enables Bishop Sheen Housing to address the critical housing needs of persons living in dilapidated mobile homes.