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Hyde Park convent converted into low-income housing

By CHRISTINE WILLIAMS

HYDE PARK — When Father Peter Nolan, CSSp became pastor at Most Precious Blood Parish in Hyde Park eight years ago, the parish's convent, which had been closed for five years, was in such disrepair that many people thought he should simply have it torn down.

But Father Nolan had a different idea. He wanted to develop the building for use as low-income housing for senior citizens. Although it has been a "difficult road," Father Nolan told *The Pilot*, Riley House, which will be home to 40 elderly residents, will open in November.

"I thought I'd never see this day. It's like a dream come true," he said. "It is to help poor people, and I'm very happy that this is what we did."

Father Nolan worked closely with the Archdiocesan Planning Office of Urban Affairs, which specializes in building affordable housing. They were turned down the first

two times they applied for assistance from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). On the third attempt, they were accepted, he said.

"It's kind of a long road, but it's a great way to use the facility that's there to help people with such a great need of housing," he added.

"Trying to put these deals together is no easy thing, and a lot of times the frustration just becomes really overwhelming. The dedication of the people who want to see the projects through and want to help the members of the community who need the most help, eventually win the day," added Taylor Caswell, HUD's New England regional director, at the dedication ceremony Oct. 19.

With the help of the Planning Office, HUD and Most Precious Blood, the Hyde Park convent was repaired and updated and a second building added to the site. The rooms are a good size with large windows and central heating and air conditioning, said Father



Pastor of Most Precious Blood Parish in Hyde Park Father Peter Nolan, CSSp speaks at the dedication of Riley House Oct. 19. Developed from the parish's former convent, Riley House will provide the neighborhood with 40 new units of low-income elderly housing.

Pilot photo by Michael Ivans

Nolan. "If you went to the Marriott, you couldn't get a nicer room," he added.

Riley House, named after Bishop Colin Riley who was pastor at Most Precious Blood for 25 years, is centrally located near a shopping center, public transportation and, most importantly, the church.

Residents at Riley House live nearer to Most Precious Blood Parish than Father Nolan, he noted.

Archbishop Séan P. O'Malley spoke at the project's dedication about the service the convent, now affordable housing, has rendered to the community.

"For many years the Most Precious Blood Convent was home to women whose lives were dedicated to the people of Hyde Park," he said. "Today we dedicate Riley House as a symbol of that continuing tradition of service to the community. The archdiocese is committed to works of social justice for our brothers and sisters in need, and Riley House is one of the success stories following from that commitment."

Jane Wallace Gumble, director of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, thanked the archbishop for his commitment to building affordable homes.

"Thank you Archbishop Séan for recognizing the role you and the Church can have in providing housing to those most in need," she said. "We don't do this without all the help of our colleagues," she said.

"I am so happy to see that this site has been redeveloped into housing for our most vulnerable and valued citizens — our elderly," said Mayor Thomas M. Menino to those gathered for the dedication ceremony. "I want to thank the Archdiocesan Planning Office for once again being a partner with the city in helping to address the housing needs of all our residents. Together, we are making a difference."