



A Solution for Kids in Crisis Since 1887 *Mercy Home for Boys & Girls*

Mission

Mercy Home for Boys & Girls is a Catholic organization answering the Gospel call by ministering to children and families in need.

Mercy Home:

- Saves young lives by providing a safe environment, a nurturing home, and opportunity for an excellent education and means for personal growth
- Supports healing for families
- Is committed to raising public awareness of youth in need and encourages support to help them
- Is sustained by benefactors who believe in the miracle of God's mercy in action.

Founding

Between 1880 and 1890, Chicago's population more than doubled. Absorbing this influx proved impossible. If they found jobs at all, new immigrants worked for meager pay in substandard conditions and lived in slums.

Archbishop Patrick Feehan, a Tipperary native, had arrived in Chicago by way of Nashville in 1880. By the middle of the decade he was alarmed at how the city's streets teemed with homeless boys. In 1886 he convened a meeting of priests. There, the Rev. Dennis Mahoney put forth a plan for a working boys home that Feehan quickly endorsed. He assigned Rev. Louis Campbell to run it.

In 1887, Fr. Campbell set up shop in rooms on LaSalle St. above a Catholic library in the shadows of the Board of Trade Building. Later that year, Campbell's endeavor was incorporated as the Mission of Our Lady of Mercy, intended "to care for the spiritual and temporal welfare of homeless and friendless working boys and waifs."

When Fr. Campbell fell ill in 1889, Fr. Dennis Mahoney took charge. He scraped together a modest down payment and purchased a private residence for the boys at what is now 1140 W. Jackson Boulevard, Mercy Home's headquarters ever since.

Leadership

Fr. Mahoney gave way in 1906 to Rev. Centennial J. Quille, who set about rebuilding the Home. Around World War I he introduced a trade-school aspect meant to teach the boys job skills. They learned bricklaying, carpentry, painting, auto mechanics, shorthand and typing, and candle making. Some learned printing on equipment Quille had acquired to aid the mission's work. The Mission Press to this day flourishes, serving Mercy Home and private businesses alike.

In 1934, amidst the Great Depression, Fr. Edward Kelly arrived. Fr. Kelly brought the CYO and its sports programs to the Home's gymnasium and basement, where a boxing ring was installed. During Fr. Kelly's 39 years as president of Mercy Home, he was dubbed "the apostle for boys" by the Chicago Daily News.

Rev. James J. Close replaced Fr. Kelly in 1973. "Fr. Jim" established a model of care that creates a therapeutic-milieu community to help youth permanently correct emotional, behavioral, and cognitive barriers to healthy life development. Close was an imaginative and tireless fundraiser. He upgraded plant and equipment, recruited a top-notch professional staff, and instituted a program of aftercare for former residents, along with programs for younger children. Close also launched a mentoring program for young people living in the Greater Chicago area known as Friends First, and established a girls home in 1987 in the former Walgreen mansion in the southwest side Beverly neighborhood.

In August 2003, Fr. Close and Rev. L. Scott Donahue, who was then Mercy Home's associate president, dramatically expanded the services available to hurting youth by

opening the Reverend James J. Close Home. The eight new home settings enabled Mercy Home to accommodate more youth than at any time in the institution's history.

Mercy Home also purchased a residential building on the southeast corner of its west side block to house an expanded aftercare program and transitional residence to help former Mercy Home youth succeed after leaving program. In addition, the family of Marge and Art Tichener donated The Christ the Healer Chapel, which opened on October 14, 2005 and represented the capstone to the multi-year expansion of Mercy Home's William E. & Mary Gannon Hay Boys' Campus.

Today, Fr. Donahue serves as Mercy Home's 8th president. A Catholic priest of the Chicago Archdiocese, Fr. Donahue served for ten years as Mercy Home's associate president, during which time he instituted the MercyWorks faith-based volunteer program of Mercy Home.

As president, Fr. Donahue continues to lead the Home's strategic vision to enhance the depth of services we provide to children in light of our recent expansion. As part of this vision, Fr. Donahue instituted the Academy, and re-structured the services we provide for young people to enhance educational and vocational achievement.

Fr. Donahue has also overseen the dramatic expansion of the AfterCare program, which offers life-long connection to Mercy Home for former residents, and has worked to strengthen our young people's faith foundations to help guide them throughout their lives. He carefully stewards the trust and support of donors across the country.



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For more information visit
us at www.mercyhome.org

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