

## **Thriving Neighborhoods, Empowered Residents**

by Fr. Paul Demuth, Housing and Safety Signals Team

From an isolated, cost prohibitive lifestyle to an affordable, inclusive living space that used to be a shopping mall! Here in Green Bay and all across the country, we constantly hear of the increased need for housing in every community. At the same time, we see office and business space that sits empty or half-used. BINGO! A match made in heaven, thanks to the creative genius of Alexia Wood, first Executive Director of St. John's Ministries.

From her careful study in her doctoral program of social connectedness, the idea of creating 72 apartments in downtown Green Bay evolved. Alexia calls them "City Center Lofts," and they're located in the last remaining segment of the former Port Plaza mall. These new living areas specifically target cost-burdened households living paycheck to paycheck and others seeking affordable housing that has an intentional focus on community. The 72 apartments range from one- to four-bedroom living spaces with modest kitchens and living areas. Just a few steps from these private apartments are large communal areas and resident services such as financial and social counseling. Rent is charged on a sliding scale based on the financial status of each renter. Occupants will be able to order groceries on line, and they'll be delivered directly to the Lofts.

This new living arrangement will be especially appealing to people working in the area as young professionals, office and wait staff, and older adults looking to downsize while remaining independent. Parking will be available in nearby public facilities, but living in the increasingly attractive downtown area will lessen the need for an auto. Biking and walking to and from work and along the beautiful nearby river walk, as well as easy access to entertainment and eating establishments, will be attractive to potential new renters. And City Center Lofts even includes a Resident Investment Program, allowing renters to set aside a portion of their rent each month to support their financial goals!

The entire project of this Gateway Collective is locally sponsored; no federal or state dollars are involved, thanks to an innovative partnership with Base Companies and the donated gifts of the people of the Green Bay area. The vision is *to create a world where every individual has access to affordable, safe and quality housing that meets their needs and aspirations, while uplifting the entire community. We believe that thriving neighborhoods and empowered residents contribute to a stronger, more resilient society.* Alexia hopes this creative approach to needed housing will serve as a model for other communities.

Final construction continues, with a hopeful opening in July. Individuals, parents with kids, and older adults are beginning to line up to join the innovative project.

If you are interested in living at City Center Lofts or donating to its success, please contact: City Center Lofts, PO Box 158, Green Bay, WI 54305 or call 920-283-0180.