

'Mother Teresa of New Bedford,' celebrated



ANDREW T. GALLAGHER/Standard-Times special

Sister Rose of Market Ministries in New Bedford welcomes Mayor Scott W. Lang and wife Gig to her retirement ceremony on Saturday.



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Sister Rose of Market Ministries in New Bedford sits and chats with friends during her retirement celebration at the Star Store building Saturday.

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NEW BEDFORD — When it came to recapping Sister Rosellen Gallogly's decades of work in the city, everyone who packed the ground floor of the Star Store Saturday afternoon for her retirement party seemed to have a story.

Sister Rose driving an addict to detox. Sister Rose visiting a homeless man in the hospital, then taking care of his belongings until he was released. Sister Rose combing the streets for homeless people and coaxing them into her Market Ministries, the homeless shelter and social service hub she, as executive director, has spearheaded since 1983. Police calling her to pick up one of "her guys," at the station.

Gallogly has done everything at Ministries, from budgeting to scrubbing the floors to preparing and serving food.

"She's the Mother Teresa of New Bedford as far as we're concerned," Sister Rose Angela said.

Inez Mercado, who has lived across the street from Gallogly for the past seven years, said whenever she barbecues, Gallogly brings over cookies, clothes and "all sorts of stuff," for her eight grandchildren.

"I count on her all the time," Mercado said, looking up from inscribing a note on a box containing candleholders she bought for Gallogly for the occasion.

Fairhaven resident Myra Lopes recalled when Gallogly brought the issue of homelessness before the local YWCA board of directors in the 1980s.

"We didn't even know what that word was. Everybody's expression was 'Where are we going with this?' It didn't seem like it could be possible here. But she knew then what was going on in the streets. She set up the beds. From that moment on, anything we didn't use we sent to Market Ministries," Lopes said.

That organization, located on Eighth Street, now provides 32 beds for homeless men and offers services like job education, social service referrals and a food bank.

"She's always had a lot of energy," said Sister Marie Andre. "She has never stopped taking care of the poor."

When it comes to the people she helps and serves, Sister Barbara Hunt said there is a "firmness," to her charity.

"She knows how to handle them. It's clear to them what they can do and can't do," Hunt said.

The first thing the Rev. Russ Chamberlain of Pilgrim United Church of Christ heard when he arrived in the city a year ago was, "If you want to know how to get things done, talk to Sister Rose."

Chamberlain delivers surplus bread from Stop & Shop to Market Ministries, among other stops, nowadays.

"She's quite the force," he said.

Father Richard Wilson, pastor of Our Lady of Guadalupe at St. James, described her as a "very good listener," who downplays her own work.

"She's doing all these great things and she doesn't bring it up," he said. "She's always concerned and asking about how you're doing."

True to form, Gallogly was reticent to talk about herself Saturday.

Asked about the motivation behind her work, she started to talk about her family. Asked if she ever gets discouraged by some of the heavy issues tethered to homelessness, she said she's "very blessed" to work with great people.

"I've had wonderful people around me," said Gallogly, who grew up one of eight children in South Providence and has been a Sister of Mercy for more than 60 years. "I've had five people work with me for the past 25 years."

Saturday, Gallogly, 80, chatted with politicians, social workers and clergy alike, talking with her hands to emphasize her points, hugging most she encountered.

The celebration followed a Mass in Gallogly's honor at Our Lady of the Assumption Church.

Her retirement plans?

"My family would like me to go on a sojourn somewhere I'm sure," she said.

She has no plans to rest on her laurels, though. She says she'll continue to help out at Market Ministries, which plans to merge with Catholic Social Services. She hopes to get involved in youth mentoring programs in the city.

Decades ago, Gallogly was the truant officer at Hayden-McFadden Elementary School on Cedar Grove Street.

Now she says, "I want to go back there" and help the students anyway she can.

Sister Angela recalled Gallogly cutting up vegetables in the kitchen of Market Ministries when a man who was staying at the shelter poked his head in to say, "Hi mom."

"That was the biggest affirmation for her, that someone could be in those circumstances and still see the love of home."