

From the streets of Philadelphia

Tom Roberts | Aug. 19, 2010 NCR Today

I spent some time recently reporting a story in the Kensington area of North Philadelphia (gunshots are heard often, residents say, and two men were shot the night I was there across the street from the house where I was staying) and had the opportunity one morning to meet Sr. Margaret McKenna.

She was conducting a Bible study that day for 20 or so addicts in various stages of rehabilitation, all part of the New Jerusalem Community, which she's been running for the past 20 years. More on her and her work in the future. (In addition, she's an award winning urban gardener and offered some wonderful home-made apple pie made with apples from a tree in her back yard.)

I was reminded that she works just a short distance in this section of Philadelphia from another amazing woman religious, Sr. Mary Scullion, whose efforts continue to transform lives and blocks in a bleak urban landscape. I had the opportunity to meet and profile Sr. Scullion some years ago ([see story here](#)) [1] and write about Project H.O.M.E., which had its roots in her advocacy for the homeless, which in turn was inspired by appearances by, among others, Dorothy Day and Mother Teresa at a 1976 Eucharistic Congress in Philadelphia.

Catholic women, vowed and otherwise, keep doing amazing things. Scullion and McKenna are among the strongest Catholic witnesses left in this section of Philadelphia, where many of the old churches have either been shuttered or taken over by non-denominational congregations

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[1] http://natcath.org/NCR_Online/archives2/1999d/121099/121099a.htm