

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

June 23, 2011 at 9:01am

Catholic college building maternity home

by SueAnn Howell by Catholic News Service

BELMONT, N.C. -- Belmont Abbey College broke ground June 20 on a campus pregnancy and aftercare maternity home called Room at the Inn.

The project's organizers say the center is the first college-based maternity center in the nation.

The 10,000-square-foot maternity home will be located on four acres donated by the Benedictine monks at Belmont Abbey. The facility is adjacent to Belmont Abbey monastery and the campus of Belmont Abbey College.

Room at the Inn, an initiative of a nonprofit maternity and aftercare center of the same name based in Charlotte, will have two residential wings, one for maternity and one for aftercare, and will be able to house up to 15 mothers, 15 infants and eight toddlers for free for up to two years. Each mother will have a private bedroom and bathroom and share the kitchen, dining room and laundry room with other residents. Administrative and counseling offices and quarters for residential managers also will be on site.

Staff and volunteers at Room at the Inn in Charlotte have long dreamed of a place where college-age pregnant women could find shelter for themselves and their children while finishing their studies.

Participants don't have to be Catholic or Christian or students at Belmont Abbey College to be accepted. They are required to be in school, adhere to a curfew, submit goal sheets and take classes in life skills, parenting, cooking, meal planning, financial planning and nondenominational Bible study, among others. In exchange, they receive free room and board and counseling and supplies they need for their babies, such as car seats, clothes and furniture.

Abbot Placid Solari of Belmont Abbey monastery offered the opening prayer at the groundbreaking ceremony. Among the guests was Serrin Foster, president of Feminists for Life.

Jeannie Wray, executive director of Room at the Inn, told the crowd that the center was proof of "the Holy Spirit in action."

"How else could we explain the willingness a group of men to provide property to underpin this fantastic new facility?" she asked. "What would inspire national pro-life leaders to travel from so far away to be part of its beginning? ... Why would a fraternal order of men declare themselves providers for young women who will never be able to thank them?"

"There is no other explanation -- it is the work of God," she concluded.

Bishop Peter J. Jugis of Charlotte then led the prayer of blessing for the new home before sprinkling the site with holy water.

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"The work we are beginning today should enliven our faith and make us grateful," Bishop Jugis said. "We know the familiar words of the psalm, 'If the Lord does not build the house, in vain do we labor.' Whenever we look to the interests of our neighbor or our community and serve them, we are in a sense God's own co-workers."

So far, \$2.2 million of the \$3 million needed to fully fund the project has been raised by donations from private individuals and groups such as the Knights of Columbus of North Carolina, who have pledged to raise \$1 million for the new maternity home.

Father Frank Pavone, national director of Priests for Life, who spoke at the groundbreaking ceremony, described the center as "a witness to the entire church about what we need to do as a church."

"This is a perfect example of the church collaborating with independent organizations who are working to provide alternatives to abortion. It tells us something about who the church is and who we are supposed to be as the people of life."

The priest also said the center should be a model for the rest of the country. "Every Catholic campus, every parish, every Catholic school, needs to be the place of first resort. When a young woman or a man feels that a new baby in their life is throwing everything out of control, they need to see that the church is the anchor, the place they can go to find help for themselves and their child."

William Thierfelder, president of Belmont Abbey College, said he hoped the home would help students understand what it means to put their faith into action.

"The students who live on this campus will get to see the reality, get to see that there are options," he said.

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