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NEWS

Reclaim Our Lady's Guild House: Residents and Activists Call for Transfer of Our Lady's Guild House to Two Boston Non-Profits

by [The Boston Sun Staff](#) • September 15, 2021 • [0 Comments](#)

Senior residents of Our Lady's Guild House (OLGH), threatened with eviction, are urging the Attorney General's Public Charities Division to take action against the owner and manager of the 140-unit rooming house for women in the Fenway neighborhood of Boston. Residents are requesting that the property be transferred to a collaborative joint venture between two experienced Boston-based non-profit affordable housing developers. Both the Planning Office for Urban Affairs (POUA), a non-profit organization affiliated with the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston, and Fenway Community Development Corporation (Fenway CDC), a local neighborhood-based non-profit, have jointly expressed interest in acquiring the property and ensuring its long-term affordability.

From 1947 until recent years, OLGH operated as permanent affordable housing for low- and moderate-income women. In 1946, the property was entrusted by the Boston Archdiocese to members of the Daughters of Mary of the Immaculate Conception, an order of nuns based in New Britain, Connecticut. After a change in leadership at the Daughters in the early 2010's, the Daughters essentially stopped running OLGH as a charity.

The Daughters hired Boston realtor Marc Roostaie (known as Marc Roos) to run the property. They raised rents, set time limits on the tenancies of residents, and began evicting long-term residents. Scores of vulnerable, senior women were displaced. Roos and the Daughters rented vacant rooms as high-priced Air BNB units until Boston outlawed the practice. Roos and the Daughters began focusing their advertisements on students, especially international students. They set an illegal age limit of 50 years old for applicants and used discriminatory language to discourage applicants with disabilities. The Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination (MCAD) found probable cause to conclude that these actions discriminated on the basis of age and disability.

MCAD also found probable cause that the Daughters' and Roos's enforcement of a newly-imposed short term rental policy at OLGH was a pretext for discrimination. The Daughters and Roos falsely claimed that OLGH was not intended to be operated as permanent housing, and enforced a four-year, and then a two-year time limit on tenancies. According to data reviewed by MCAD, this and OLGH's other discriminatory policies virtually erased the population of senior residents at OLGH. Between 2009 and 2019 the number of 18- to 29-year-olds increased from 16 to 85, an increase of 86.3%. In the same time period, the population of tenants over 50 declined from 46 to 8, with all of the remaining 8 senior tenants facing eviction due to the Daughters' and Roos's time limit policy.

According to Boston Census and tenant survey data, from 2009-2010 to 2019, the number of students at OLGH increased from 17 to 89, or over 60 %, while the number of working, unemployed or retired residents decreased substantially. Moreover, the number of Boston residents who were able to gain access to OLGH plummeted. In 2009-2010, more than 80 women described themselves as permanent residents of OLGH and Boston. In 2019, no women described themselves as permanent residents of OLGH and Boston in a resident survey, other than the handful of older remaining tenants facing eviction.

Through these actions over the past 10 years, the Daughters and Roos have jettisoned OLGH's charitable purpose of providing permanent, affordable housing for low- and moderate-income women in Boston. In addition to blatantly discriminating against seniors and those with disabilities, the Daughters and Roos have imposed illegal fees, and violated other landlord-tenant and consumer protection statutes.

Mother Jennifer Carroll, who initiated the alliance with Roos and the mass displacement of senior, low-income women, passed away this past February. Residents and advocates see a unique opportunity for an optimal resolution, given the combination of new leadership together with an appropriate potential buyer for the OLGH. Mother Janice Zdunczyk became the new leader of the Daughters in June.

Senior OLGH residents have identified Fenway CDC and POUA as potential new owners for the building. Fenway CDC, a Fenway neighborhood-based housing provider, has a long history of advocacy and organizational support for residents of OLGH. POUA, a non-profit housing developer, has developed nearly 3,000 units of affordable housing in Massachusetts. Residents and allies of OLGH recently met with Bill Grogan, President of POUA, who conveyed POUA's strong interest in collaborating with Fenway CDC to acquire the building. Leaders of both organizations have offered their respective commitments to returning the rooming house to its charitable mission and have reached out to the Daughters' leadership expressing their interest in making a purchase offer.

OLGH residents and allies led a postcard campaign appealing to Attorney General Maura Healey to act to transfer the building. Residents appreciate the efforts of Shafaq Islam, Deputy Chief of the Civil Rights Division, and Jonathan Green, Deputy Chief of the Public Charities Division, in pursuing a remedy for the Daughters' and Roos's actions departing from OLGH's charitable mission, discriminating against senior and disabled residents and applicants, and myriad other violations of law.

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