

"Humble Beginnings", written by Peter Kaseta, O.F.M. Cap, was originally published in the Bulletin of the Province of Saint Mary, Volume 22, Number 2, dated February 1985, page 36. The article is being presented in its original form.

*Twenty eight years later—*

# Nehemiah Housing continues to grow

"You see our wretched plight.  
Jerusalem lies in ruins,  
its gates destroyed by fire.

Come let us rebuild  
the wall of Jerusalem  
and be rid of the reproach."

The Prophet Nehemiah



[Top-right] 1985-Brendan Buckley; [above] Philip Fabiano an early participant of the EBC and community organizer in support of the Nehemiah Plan; John Gallagher offered continued support as pastor [1984-1990]



## Humble Beginnings

The **Nehemiah** concept was formally announced by Brooklyn's Bishop Francis Mugavero and the East Brooklyn Churches at a press conference in June, 1982. Named for the biblical prophet who oversaw the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem, the plan is to build on the vast acres of vacant land in eastern Brooklyn and offer the homes to buyers with incomes between \$20,000 and \$40,000.

The Provincial Chapter of 1984, in response to proposals from the Capuchin fraternity at Saint Michael Parish, one of the 47 members of East Brooklyn Churches, directed the newly elected Definitory to make an interest-free loan of \$250,000 through the Bishop of Brooklyn to the Nehemiah Trust Plan.

With the help of this and other financial assistance, a revolving pool of funds has been established. This pool, along with the cooperation and funding of City and State agencies, has enabled construction to begin.

The friars of St. Michael fraternity, principally Brendan Buckley and John Gallagher, guardian and pastor, have been actively involved in the work of East Brooklyn Churches and the Nehemiah Plan housing efforts.

As of 01 February 1985, 211 units have been completed and occupied. One hundred and thirty-nine units are under construction. Ultimately, 5000 units are planned for the Brownsville, East New York and Bushwick areas of Brooklyn, 1600 of which are planned for East New York, the area of the parish community of Saint Michael.

Forty five percent of the present Nehemiah Homes occupants are residents of East Brooklyn Churches, fifty five percent are residents of Brownsville and East New York, and forty percent are former residents of area public housing.

Average combined income of families in the new housing is \$23,000. Because of many contributing factors, each family pays an average of \$310.00 monthly mortgage and \$40.00 for water and sewer charges.

General Manager of the project is affable I.D. Robbins. His knowledge, expertise, persistence, patience and wisdom guide the project through many obstacles and over many hurdles. Prominent on the wall of the model unit, which serves as Mr. Robbins' office, is an adaptation of St. Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against systems and power...and against spiritual wickedness in high places."