

## IHM's in Action



Sisters Ann Gabriel Kilsdonk, IHM, (left) and Ann (Marie Nora) Nett, IHM, (right) live and work in Detroit, and they are passionate about their city.



So when Marygrove College announced a grassroots effort to improve and revitalize the area bounded by Livernois Ave., 7 Mile Rd. and the Lodge Freeway as part of its strategic plan, the two quickly volunteered for the project.

The project, Our Neighborhood Engaged (ONE), was launched last August and is based on the premise that the people who can best develop solutions for neighborhood revitalization are those who live, work and worship there.



Summer in the City volunteers begin painting over graffiti.

The same building several days later



"More than 200 people – residents and business owners alike – attended a series of town hall meetings last summer and fall," Sister Ann Gabriel says. "The group created a vision of what we wanted the neighborhood to be – economically stable, and an environment where people know each other and look out for one another. We prioritized strategies to make it happen and four major committees were formed."

Sisters Ann Gabriel and Ann are members of ONE's Clean, Safe and Attractive Committee. They participated in an area survey which identified abandoned houses, buildings covered in graffiti and properties that were overgrown and littered with rubbish. They also helped distribute ONE flyers to business owners and residents and invited them to become involved in reclaiming the neighborhood.

"This isn't a one-time clean-up effort," notes Sister Ann. "It's an ongoing work that encourages us to pull together because that's the only way we'll be successful."

In addition to the property improvement projects, volunteers have worked to remove flyers and handbills from lamp-posts and distributed a dozen gift cards to residents who are actively working to improve their own properties.

ONE partners with other organizations in Detroit to clean and beautify the neighborhood. Summer in the City provided student volunteers to paint colorful murals over graffiti, and the Detroit Rescue Mission Ministry has cleaned up 17 properties along McNichols and mows the grass each week.

“Jo Ann Cusmano, Marygrove’s vice president for strategic initiatives, made the contact with groups we thought might be a ‘good fit’ for us,” explains Sister Ann Gabriel. “She recently wrote a grant proposal which would help fund ONE’s ‘graffiti abatement and neighborhood mural branding’ project.”

“Although the response has been very positive from businesses owners and residents, we need additional funding and more participation,” Sister Ann adds. “ONE has faced some legal hurdles as well. For instance, even if a property has been abandoned, we need to track down the owner to get permission to clean it up.

“In spite of the challenges, we’re all determined to make a difference.”

*More information about Our Neighborhood Engaged is available [online](#).*