



Sept. 7, 1941 – Nov. 6, 2017

When Gary Tatu and his wife heard Christian singer John Michael Talbot invoke Jesus' message to "sell all you have, give it to the poor," they took that message to heart.

The couple sold their comfortable home in Amherst so they could buy the former South Presbyterian Church at 1782 Seneca St., where they co-founded Harvest House, a spirituality center and service agency in South Buffalo.

"We have \$180,000 in a house that serves just the two of us," Gary Tatu told Buffalo News religion reporter Dave Condren in 1993 after acquiring the church. "We can take that money and put it in this building and serve hundreds of people."

Mr. Tatu died Monday at the age of 76 in Safire Southtowns Rehabilitation Center after a short illness.

His legacy includes leaving a life as a successful home improvement contractor to become a champion of the poor in Buffalo.

Linda and Gary Tatu moved into an apartment in the church they purchased 24 years ago and gradually overcame the fears of neighbors about outsiders coming to the center.

They paid off the mortgage on Harvest House seven years early, and then 14 years ago turned a donated former truck dealership at 175 Jefferson Ave. into the Harvest House Ministry Center, which houses a health care clinic, an education center for adults, and a ministry that provides free clothing for children.

"His vision to help lift people out of poverty is the gift he has left to the community," said Carol Murphy, president of Harvest House.

The Tatus received numerous awards, including Buffalo News Citizen of the Year in 1999, the Daniel R. Acker Community Service Award from the NAACP Buffalo Branch and the Sister Karen Klimczak Peaceprints Award.

They were also have been honored with the President's Award for Community Service from Trocaire College in 2011 and the Spirit of Mercy Award from Mount Mercy Academy in 2013.

Mr. Tatu was born in Buffalo and was a member of the Class of 1959 at Williamsville High School. After graduating from the U.S. Naval Training Academy in Bainbridge, Md., he studied at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis.

Returning to Buffalo, he began working as an insurance underwriter for Crum & Forester. The remodeling work on he did on his home in Amherst led neighbors to ask him to work on their houses and soon he had a thriving business as a home improvement contractor in Amherst and Clarence.

He also built and operated the Creative Play Center Preschool in Clarence.

He graduated from the Chaplaincy Course at the St. Jude Center. He was active in the Buffalo Cursillo, Kairos Prison Ministry and Koinonia movements. He also was part of the team that took the first Christian retreats to St. Petersburg, Russia.

He volunteered for Meals on Wheels and, for 20 years, at the former Erie County Home and Infirmary, where he and his wife started the Christmas Day visiting program.

He was a past member of the Niagara River Yacht Club, the Jolly Boys of Williamsville and the Western New York Coaster Club.

He and Linda first met through another coincidence. Both were attending a roller coaster convention at Darien Lake.

"We went up on the Viper and he sat beside me," she recalled. They were married in 1985.

In addition to his wife, survivors include two sons, David and Daniel; a daughter, Tamara Rutledge; a brother, Albert; two sisters, Sandra McCormick and Barbara Iuvone; and two granddaughters.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be offered at 10 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 11 in St. Ambrose Catholic Church, 65 Ridgewood Road.