

Housing complex a 'horror'

Diocese tied to troubled apts.

BY MELISSA GRACE

TENANTS IN A BROWNSVILLE housing development with ties to the Brooklyn Diocese are living in apartments covered by mold, infested with mice and plagued by broken elevators.

In a move to clean up hundreds of long-standing violations at Riverdale Osborn Towers, the diocese put Catholic Charities in charge of the complex — but only after the city slammed its management company with a civil suit.

"As soon as we were aware of [the problems] we became actively engaged," said Father Alfred LoPinto of Catholic Charities, the diocese's social services affiliate.

LoPinto said he was first told about the violations at the complex last summer when the priest in charge of the Watkins St. low-income complex asked for help.

Two weeks ago, a new management company was hired to run the 564-apartment complex.

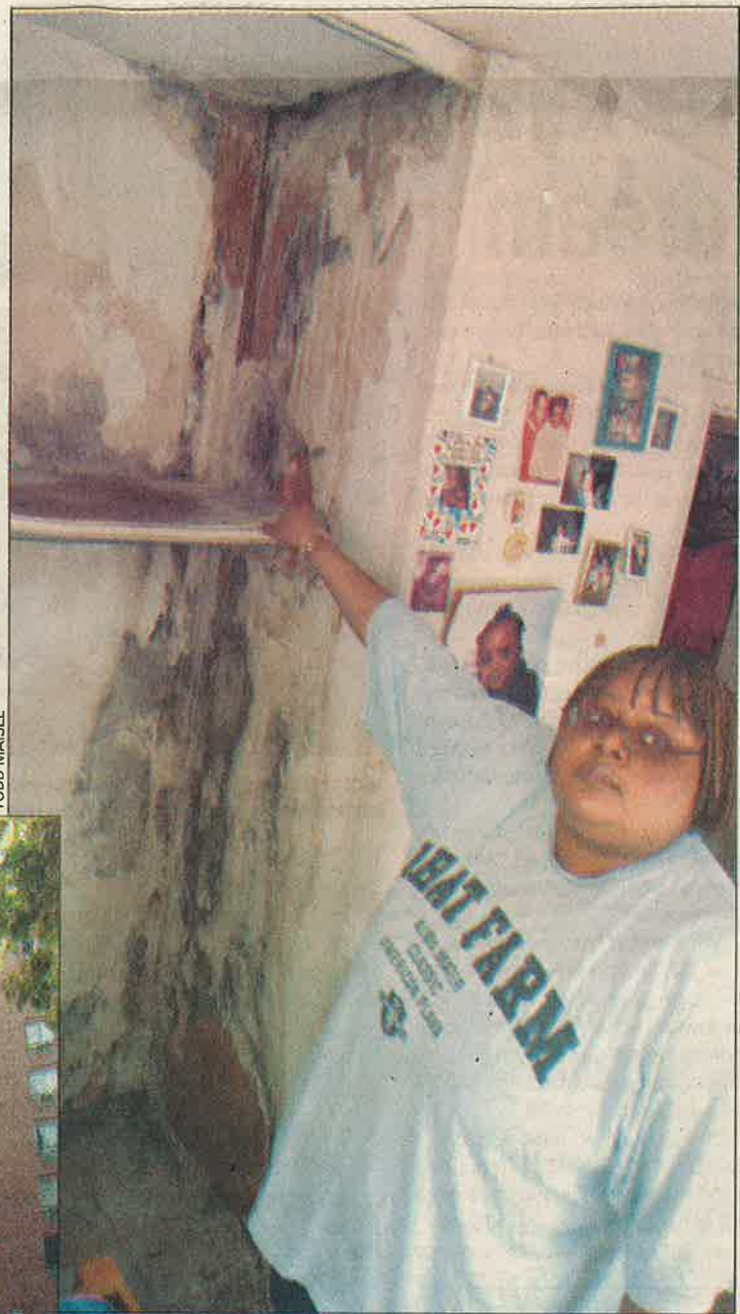
Help may be on the way but not fast enough for tenants who were shocked to learn the church was linked to the buildings.

"For the church to be involved and not come around and talk to people," said Veronica Chappelle, who lives with mold that's been growing in her apartment for four years and had to seal off a fungus-infested bedroom. "I'm really shocked."

Debra Brown said her apartment stinks of feces because of a leak. Her refrigerator has been broken for months.

Veronica Chappelle, right, shows the severe mold condition in her apartment at the Riverdale Osborn towers (below) on Watkins Ave. in Brownsville.

TODD MAISEL



"I was thinking [the landlord] was a multimillionaire who didn't care about the little people," Brown said.

Riverdale Osborn is one of two Brooklyn apartment complexes funded with federal rent subsidies and established with the involvement of local Catholic parishes.

Our Lady of Mercy pastor Robert

Powers, who has headed Riverdale Osborn's nonprofit boards since 2001, said he tried to resolve the problems.

"I worked very hard in my four years here advocating for tenants, trying to work with [the management company]," said Powers. "I certainly have not been blind to the violations."

The city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development sued Residential Management Associates last December to get the 543 violations

corrected. HUD last week blamed mismanagement by RMA for the buildings' problems — but RMA president John Cameron called the complex "a horror show," charging the violations were Powers' poor management and HUD's fault for refusing to raise rents enough to cover repairs.

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