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February 18, 2010

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

February 2, 2010, a happy day in the life of Unity Acres: the 50th Anniversary of Ordination of our chaplain, Father Robert Jones. Despite much planning and preparation during the preceding week, the day itself was still a busy one with untold details to be attended to, right until the hour of Father's arrival at Unity Acres in the mid-afternoon. Flowers for the altar have to be ordered, and the dining hall decorated. The menu for the evening must be agreed.

Mass for the Feast of the Presentation was celebrated in our Sacred Heart Chapel at four o'clock in the afternoon. Men of Unity Acres were in attendance, as were neighbors from close-by, friends from Syracuse and the North Shore, and Father Jones' brother Bill and niece Amy, by Unity Acres staff and board members, as well as our regular Sunday and week-day congregants, all united in our commemoration of this special day. Thanks to Peg, who thought to bring her camcorder, we have a videotape record of the liturgy.

An honor guard from the Fairmount Knights of Columbus made an especially striking impression as they processed toward the altar. The Mass itself was concelebrated by Father Jones and Father Moritz Fuchs. The program included songs by one of Father Jones' favorite song-writers, Carey Landry: *"Surprise, Surprise, God is a Surprise,"* and *"Smile, Don't You Know God Loves You."* After communion, there was time set aside for the people assembled to share a word or two: personal reflections on Father Jones' priestly ministry, a story or a word of thanks and appreciation. A prayer and blessing for priests was prayed by all the people and the liturgy concluded with the usual dismissal: *"The Mass is ended, go in peace,"* and the people's response, *"Thanks be to God."* Father Jones then hastened to indicate that our celebration of the Eucharist would continue: that the celebration would move from the table of the Lord in the Chapel to the tables in our dining hall. Another communion would take place there.

On these occasions, it takes a long time for everyone to be seated: people must meet and greet one another, and offer once again their congratulations and thanks. At last, everyone has found a place and the assembly is called to order, so that Sister Monica may pray a blessing over the food to be shared. Then one by one, the tables are called out, and each of the residents and guests go up to the serving line. The kitchen staff have prepared ziti and meatballs, with salad and bread. Gary has baked a cake, which Laura volunteered to decorate. Dawn, Loretta,

John and Laura helped serve the meal. Helen, Marie and Aleata made and served chocolate brownie sundaes. Near the end of the evening, Mary Agnes leads the company in singing "Happy Anniversary to You," and "For He's a Jolly Good Fellow."



Many thanks to all who attended, to all who helped out in preparing the food and decorating the dining hall. Special thanks to Fred, who tidied up our chapel in advance of Mass, to Steve D for photographing the event, and to my mother Loretta for helping to co-ordinate plans for the day.

And finally, to Father Jones, congratulations on your Anniversary, and Thank-you for your ministry at Unity Acres!

February 21, 2010

*"May we work together to build up the earthly city,
with our eyes fixed on the city that lasts forever,"
—Morning Prayer, 1st Sunday of Lent*

Last month's newsletter included Mark Baker's summary of building projects undertaken during 2009. We had several goals in mind in selecting our major projects for the year. Enhancing the men's safety and comfort, and reducing energy consumption were particular objectives in our planning. Various improvements were also suggested by our residents who themselves volunteered to take on those projects.

Last October, our Fund-Raiser committee had issued a special 'Energy Project' appeal, which was very well received by our donors and benefactors. Donations to our 'Energy Project' totaled in excess of \$16,000. Once again, we offer our thanks to all who so generously responded to this appeal.

What does a \$16,000 'Energy Fund' do for Unity Acres? It helps us to provide for the basic material conditions necessary for offering our residents on-going hospitality: in a word, warmth and light. Our 'Energy Fund' will offset some of our costs for heating and electricity during the months ahead.

And knowing that at least some of these costs have been covered through our 'Energy' appeal, by late November we felt confident to go ahead with suggested improvements in view of increasing the energy-efficiency of our buildings.

Insulation was added to buildings that previously were under-insulated and new



energy-efficient windows were installed in the second story of the Infirmary. These improvements have already begun to have a noticeable effect, and we hope to be able to do more in the future.

Ours is an aging facility; the buildings are large and difficult to heat, and our energy costs have increased greatly during recent years. Until 2006, all the buildings at Unity Acres were heated with fuel oil. In

recent years, our combined costs for electricity, fuel oil and propane increased greatly. And as these costs have continued to increase over time, we have attempted to take steps, big and small, to reduce our consumption of electricity and fuel oil.

During the late spring of 2005, an informal survey of energy use was conducted by members of our Board of Directors and recommendations made concerning reduction of energy use. These preliminary recommendations were subsequently implemented by our residents and staff.

In September 2006, a Fall Festival was held at Saint Ann's Parish in Manlius, New York. The proceeds of the event were dedicated to the purchase and installation of an out-door wood-boiler which would be used for heating the Star Building, which houses our kitchen and dining hall, as well as a recreation room. This first boiler was put into service in December 2006. We have since then realized very significant reductions in our use of electricity and fuel oil in the operation of this building.

Since much of the Unity Acres property is forested, and our residents harvest, cut, split and stack the needed firewood, and operate the boiler, we have been able to operate this boiler at very minimal expense.

During the summer of 2008, we determined the installation of a second out-door wood boiler as a major capital improvement goal for Unity Acres. This second out-door wood boiler would provide heating and domestic hot water to a group of three linked buildings. Two of these buildings, the Infirmary and the Annex, house 28 men; the Brick Building currently houses a carpentry shop and a storage area.

The eventual purchase of our second out-door wood boiler was funded by a generous grant received during the summer of 2009 from the Order of Malta, Federal Association, USA. Additional funding was received from the Alden Street Foundation and the 1st Presbyterian Church in Cazenovia, which helped cover the costs site preparation and installation. We are most grateful to the members of the Order of Malta, 1st Presbyterian Church in Cazenovia, and the Alden Street Foundation for their generous support, without which we would not have been able to proceed with this project.

The new boiler was delivered on December 1, and was situated immediately to the east of the of the wood-boiler which serves the Star Building, so that only one wood-storage area would be needed for both boilers and for the convenience of the boiler-operator, Roger Irwin. Installation was complete the following day. The new boiler put into use that same day, and has since been in continuous use.

As we had planned (and hoped), we have realized a major reduction in consumption of fuel oil for heating these buildings and we can confidently project further reductions in our heating costs during the up-coming months of the heating season this year and into the future.

Our out-door wood-boilers are also suited for other alternative fuels, such as anthracite coal and ear corn. We have already done a very preliminary test-burn of coal. In future, as we correlate our available supply to our consumption of firewood, we will investigate the feasibility of switching to coal as fuel for part of the year.

Savings in energy costs free up limited resources for other obligations, for meeting the needs of our residents for food and other supplies, and for the general maintenance of our buildings and equipment, as well as other major projects and improvements.

The project of the moment is a major renovation of the Chapel, about which, I hope to be able to write more next month.

Stephen Dickhout

February Prayer: Priesthood

Note: In 1969, Father Ray McVey, an ordained priest, began this home for homeless men, Unity Acres. His priestly, sacramental ministry was carried out here, along with the works of mercy, compassion and justice. The continuous celebration of Eucharist assured the sacramental presence of Jesus in the Chapel and over all the buildings and people. There was a vital connection between the priestly rituals and everyday life at the Acres.

When God called Father Ray to Himself, other priests come to offer sacrifice and sacraments.

It then fell to me to continue this ministry here as Chaplain. It is a great privilege and a fitting setting for me to function as priest and minister to God's people here. I give thanks to God for this and for all the places He has sent me through 50 years.

“Every ... priest is chosen from his fellow men and appointed to serve God on their behalf.” – Hebrews 5. 1

“The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because the LORD has anointed me.” – Isaiah 61. 1

“Receive the power to offer sacrifice to God...” – Ordination Rite, 1960

“Father, unworthy as I am, You have chosen me to share in the eternal priesthood of Christ and the ministry of Your Church. May I be an ardent and gentle servant of Your Gospel and sacraments.” Amen. – Mass on the Anniversary of Ordination.

Father Robert Jones