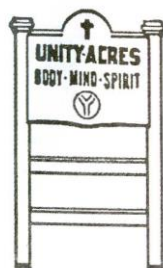


Unity Acres

2290 Co. Rte. 2

P. O. Box 153

Orwell NY 13426



Phone: (315) 298-6215

Fax: (315) 298-5356

unityacres@msn.com

www.unityacres.org

March 31, 2011

Dear Friends and Residents of
Unity Acres,

Ordinarily our newsletters are addressed firstly to folks on our mailing list – hence the usual greeting *Dear Friends* – and only secondarily to our residents, since the purpose of these approximately monthly letters is to communicate to our donors events and happenings here at the Acres, of which our residents will have had already first-hand knowledge, and to present to the consideration of our donors our most pressing material needs.

I am making an exception this month, in order to report to our donors and friends, and especially to ‘memorialize’ for our residents, a few themes and issues addressed at a recent meeting of the community in our Chapel last Thursday, March 24. And in the present instance, the needs of the community we are highlighting are not material needs, but rather moral and spiritual needs. And these are needs that can only be addressed from within ourselves.

The northern climate that at times we enjoy and at times endure leads to a frequent pre-occupation with the weather and the passing seasons. By the end of March, if the snow has melted, if the temperatures have risen, if the brook hasn’t flooded, we often feel ourselves a bit like Noah, making an opening in the Ark, looking out, and wondering if there mightn’t be a place for a raven or dove to perch, and whether the waters have receded and whether the earth has begun to dry out.

As for us, when the red-wing blackbirds and finches and robin make their first appearance, we have a sign at last that long months of being ‘shut in’ are at an end, and that the many tasks and chores of maintenance, of building, of cleaning and painting, of planting, raking, mowing and so on – impossible or deferred for the winter – may soon begin in earnest. Noah, upon being released from the Ark began, worshipped God by building an altar and offering sacrifice, then set to work, cultivating the soil, and planting a vineyard. (We ourselves won’t be planting any vineyards in the stony soil of Orwell!)

Noah had received the vocation of *life sustainer* in the face of the overpowering surge of mighty waters, in the midst of a universal cataclysm, preserving “a remnant of the earth at the coming of the flood.” (Sirach 44, 17) In order to enact his vocation of life sustainer, Noah first *built*, then entered the Ark with his companions. In order to preserve life, Noah had to *create*, to build, a place of safety.

Unity Acres celebrates its anniversary each year on the third of March. This year was our 42nd anniversary. We have set out from time to time in newsletters, in talks, in our liturgies, to describe the beginnings of Unity Acres, to reflect on the ‘Aims and Purposes’ of Unity Acres, as these were first articulated, and as these have evolved over the years, and to emphasize the idea of “building community”.

The purpose of Unity Acres, since its beginnings, has been to create a place of safety, of refuge, a sanctuary, for homeless men. We have sought to preserve the lives of men whose well-being is threatened by homelessness, alcoholism, addiction, the violence and disorder of the streets. To that end, the basics of life are provided: shelter, food, clothing, and a supportive community.

Unity Acres has had to invent, and re-invent itself to adjust to new circumstances, but also to return, again and again, to certain foundational principles and concepts. In November 2009, after much discussion, our Board of Directors, adopted a mission statement: *Unity Acres is a House of Hospitality for men. Our mission is to provide a safe, caring and permanent home for men, and particularly those who have become chronically homeless due to alcohol or substance abuse, or other factors.* The term ‘House of Hospitality’ in our mission statement is an acknowledgement of Unity Acres’ Catholic Worker roots, the inspiration of the witness and work of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, Father Ray McVey and Kate Stanton, and countless others – residents, volunteers, staff – who worked together to build up the community that Unity Acres is today.

A few years ago, Bob Belge and John Cadley designed a pamphlet describing Unity Acres as a “place of constant miracles.” One of our miracles is the mere fact of our continued existence, for more than forty years, despite our limited resources and small staff, and in the absence of government or diocesan funding. There is also the miracle of the great degree of harmony and order and cooperation that exists here on a day-to-day basis.

Father McVey took possession of the old Oswego County TB Sanatorium in 1969, and spent the rest of his life here until his death in 1995. He had little or no institutional backing. He had his bishop’s blessing, but little else in terms of money or staffing. For forty-two years, Unity Acres has depended on the contributions of hundreds of benefactors, dozens of volunteers. Unity Acres has also depended for its continued existence on the active cooperation and participation of the men who live here. Without the cooperation of our residents in preparing meals, driving errands, cutting firewood, gardening, tending the hogs, painting, maintaining the buildings and vehicles, doing the laundry, to name only a few of the tasks for which the men are exclusively or largely responsible, Unity Acres could not remain in operation, for even a very short time.

We have many times debated whether to require any of our able-bodied residents to take on specific chores – Father McVey never wished to coerce anyone’s participation – nor do we wish to now. However, we have always felt certain that given enough patience and time that it would be unnecessary to mandate the men’s cooperation in accomplishing the day-to-day activities of the Acres. Regrettably, this seems less true now than it was in the past.

In attempting to address this question and other ever recurring problems and issues, and on the other to reinforce the ideals of home and community, our staff has had to set down certain standards and expectations for the men living here. Many years ago, the rule of Unity Acres was summed up in one quick phrase: “No Drinking and No Fighting!!” There have been several revisions to the rule, necessitated as new circumstances have from time to time arisen. Clarifications have been made, and these expectations have been put in writing in a “Rule Sheet”. We ask each new resident to read and agree and sign a copy upon admission to the Acres. The rule outlines what might be more usefully called “community norms.” Living in close quarters, everyone’s behavior and attitude effects everyone else. Expectations concerning “passes”, outside employment, cleanliness and personal hygiene, and so on, have been included, but one phrase has appeared on these sheets in their various iterations for many years: *“The purpose of the above rules is to assure that Unity Acres remains a safe and peaceful community for the residents, and a safe workplace for the staff and volunteers.”*

The rule is meant to promote cohesion and enhance community at Unity Acres. We have perhaps not been as consistent and clear as might have been useful in communicating and emphasizing the positive aspects of the terms of the rule: *“Unity Acres is a community for those who have no other place to live. We encourage everyone to pitch in any way possible with the upkeep here.”* Some time ago, the rule concluded with the following words: *“We ask you to sign the sheet in Agreement and as your covenant with your community to abide by these simple rules of sharing life here with each other.”*

As everyone may well appreciate one of the very practical and hands-on means of sharing life, and meeting one another’s needs in this community is the provision of laundry service to the men. Whenever I read Jesus’ discourse on the Last Judgment (Mt 25, 31-46), I connect the day-to-day functions of the Acres to Christ’s words, *“I was hungry and you fed me, I was ill-clad and you gave me clothing....”* I believe that the kitchen workers are enacting these words, the men working in the clothing room and laundry are enacting these words, and that these men in meeting and serving one another’s needs will receive their reward in due time. On February 11, our long-time laundry worker, HARRY ANDERSON, died quite suddenly. A native of West Virginia, Harry first came to Unity Acres in 1981, and like many of our men, Harry would settle in at the Acres perhaps for several months or years at a time, and then return to Syracuse, again for months or years at a time. Harry returned to Unity Acres for the last time in 2002, and remained here until his death. He had assisted in the night watch for many months in the early 2000s, but really seemed to have his niche in the laundry, where he faithfully did his part in assuring that the men’s clothing and bedding was cleaned and made fit for continued use. Harry’s sudden death was a great shock to all. His family in West Virginia arranged for Harry’s funeral and burial to be conducted there, on February 17. In the absence of a funeral here, we conducted instead a memorial service in the chapel that was well-attended. The men’s recollections and testimonies were moving, and we know that Harry is missed by all. Harry, we know that you have now taken *“as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.”* May you have rest from your labors. AMEN.

Steve Dickhout

The other day at Unity Acres I was walking from the ‘B’ Building to the Mess Hall when my spiritual eyes were opened and I saw two angels on each side of me holding me so I did not fall. God knowing how much I am uncoordinated clearly does not want me to fall. And there were times that on the ice or mud I lost my footing and should have fallen. And there was a time or two that I did but did not get hurt because one of the angels broke my fall.

I see with my spiritual eyes angels all around me walking with the men and the staff keeping them safe as we enjoy the snow and ice we have here in Orwell. Even as I am doing medical transport, picking up mail, and running errands with Loretta, *God drives the car!* I am just the one with my hands on the wheel. As I know, God looks out for us all here: those who drive on snow-covered roads or walk across the icy sidewalks.

I thank God for the angels that he has given charge of me, and all of us.

Praise be to God.

Robert Koos

Lenten Prayer

“Though your sins be as scarlet, I will wash you as clean as snow. Though they be deeply stained, I will make you as white as wool...” *Isaiah 1, 18*

Merciful God, our culture, our society, in our country and our world, too often seduce us. We humbly ask You: Help us to turn back to You. Evil was rampant is the time of Daniel. We make his prayer-confession our own.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS	“Lord, great and awesome God, you who keep your merciful covenant toward those who love you and observe your commandments! We have sinned, been wicked and done evil; we have rebelled and departed from your commandments and your laws. We have not obeyed your servants the prophets, who spoke in your name to our kings, our princes, our fathers, and all the people of the land. Justice, O Lord, is on your side; we are shamefaced even to this day: we, the men of Judah, the residents of Jerusalem, and all Israel, near and far, in all the countries to which you have scattered them because of their treachery toward you. O Lord, we are shamefaced, like our kings, our princes, and our fathers, for having sinned against you. But yours, O Lord, our God, are compassion and forgiveness! Yet we rebelled against you and paid no heed to your command, O Lord, our God, to live by the law you gave us through your servants the prophets.” -- Daniel 9, 4b-10	WARS
BIGOTRY		VIOLENCE
MATERIALISM		FRAUD
LUST		CORRUPTION
ABORTION		GREED
ABUSE		WASTEFULNESS
INDIFFERENCE		

“Father, You have taught us to overcome our sins by prayer, fasting and works of mercy, When we are discouraged by our weakness, give us confidence in Your love.” -- *Third Sunday in Lent*

Father Robert Jones