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January 17, 2010

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

"I was struck very deeply during the liturgy ... at all the living vibrant expressions of Christian hospitality, of small loving communities, celebrating now, yes, but even more importantly sharing the brokenness, the alienation, the vulnerability of so many of our brothers and sisters... Jean Vanier [founder of L'Arche] stresses the importance of celebration as a builder of community and vitality. Small celebrations, big celebrations – a very real expression of the joy that should permeate our lives."

–Father Raymond McVey, August 1989.

During the days and weeks between Thanksgiving and Christmas, there is customarily a great flurry of activity at Unity Acres, in preparation for our celebration of the holiday. There are packages to be assembled, donations sorted, and gifts wrapped. *[Thank-you, Laura, Mark, Anne-Marie, Dan and Will !]* The chapel is prepared for Advent and Christmas: the purple and pink Advent Candles are taken out of storage, the manger set up in front of the altar with three Kings and their camels waiting, stage left, for the day of Epiphany. Christmas trees are set up in the sitting room and the dining hall is decorated. Strings of Christmas lights are strung in the windows of the Solarium facing the passing traffic on Route 2. On Christmas Eve after dinner, each of our residents is called on by name to receive a package of gifts that have been selected for him from among the gifts received during the weeks and days prior. As each name is called out, the assembled men applaud. Each of the residents receives a large gift bag. On Christmas day, each of the residents also receives a Christmas stocking filled with candy and some more toiletry items. *[Thank-you, Sue Heinley!]* This seasonal flurry of activity is not limited to our men and our staff. Many individuals and parishes and other groups participate, in one way or another, in our celebrations at Christmas and at other times of the year. How easy it is at times, though, to be distracted from the spirit and purpose of these holidays and celebrations.

"Celebration nourishes us, restores hope, and brings us the strength to live with the suffering and difficulties of everyday life"–Jean Vanier, Community and Growth.

In opening our doors during times of celebration we make our hospitality both visible and real. For our celebrations, to be real, vibrant and 'builders of community', we try, haltingly, to cultivate within ourselves a disposition of joy, and of gratitude to, and for, one another, in our brokenness, alienation and vulnerability. *Celebration is important. Celebration builds community.*

So we hasten to offer thanks to the many, many friends who sought in one way or another to enhance our celebration of the birth of the Savior. Thank-you for the notes and cards which we received in great quantities during the weeks preceding Christmas, each of which expressed care and concern for the needs and well-being of every one at the Acres. Thank-you for the many Christmas gifts, gratefully received from Saint Mary's in Skaneateles, Saint Stephen's in Phoenix and from Saint Leo and Saint Ann's in Holland Patent. Thank-you for generous donations of needed groceries and toiletry items, Saint Peter's in Utica, and Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton in Baldwinsville. Thank-you to the Altar and Rosary Society of Christ Our Light in Pulaski and Lacona for their Annual Christmas Party – this has become a long-standing tradition, of perhaps 30 years or more; we enjoyed a dinner of roast beef and roast pork, along with all the trimmings, vegetables, salads, desserts and so on, as well as the company of these generous and thoughtful people. Thank-you to the members of the Mexico United Methodist Church for serving dinner on Christmas Day, as they had done only a few weeks before at Thanksgiving.

And so we offer as well, a word of thanks to all of you who receive this newsletter, who think about the needs of the men of Unity Acres, who offer up a prayer for the benefit of the Acres, who send along a donation of clothing, a word of encouragement, or who assist the men in any way, tangibly or intangibly... It is through you that God is providing for us, as He has done for more than 40 years, and we are grateful. We offer thanks to you, and *for* you. (Thanks and prayers for our benefactors are offered at every Mass celebrated at our Chapel at Unity Acres.)

“Celebration is the specific act of a community as people rejoice and give thanks to the Father ...”

Celebrations are important. Celebrations build community. On January 16, 2010, a loving community of family and friends gathered on the Near Westside of Syracuse, at Saint Lucy's Church, to rejoice and give thanks, to celebrate Eucharist, and to celebrate Jerry Berrigan's 90th Birthday. The celebrant at Mass was Father Al Nortz, brother of our own Sister Monica. Following Mass, the celebration moved across Gifford Street to the Auditorium of Saint Lucy's School, for a shared meal of salads, bread, pasta and desserts. Peg, Father Jones, Loretta, Lorraine Hoyt, and I traveled south from Oswego County to join Jerry's family and friends in celebrating Jerry's life and his unwavering commitment to peace and justice. Many members of our broader community of supporters, members of the Unity Acres board, were present as well. We celebrate as well Jerry's stalwart advocacy and friendship toward our little community at the Acres. *Ad multos annos!*

Celebrations are important. Celebrations build community. In a few days, we will be marking another milestone. Father Jones will be celebrating his 50th Anniversary of Ordination on the Feast of the Presentation. We are planning a Mass of Thanksgiving, and hope that many members of the extended family of Unity Acres will be able to join us then, as we rejoice and give thanks.

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Up until his retirement in July 2008, it was JOHN VIDA who had been the funeral director that served the Unity Acres community. John passed away on December 16 at the age of eighty-two. Our very deepest sympathies are extended to John's wife Millie and to their four children.

During the early years, John and Father McVey worked together to arrange burials for our men at the Richland Town Cemetery. Between 1969 and 1977, some 60 men from Unity Acres had been buried at Richland, causing some concern on the part of officials that there might not be sufficient room in future for burial of residents of the town, space at the Richland Cemetery being somewhat limited by the surrounding Water District lands. [*Peg McCarthy, Father Jones, and I found a plot containing the graves of several Unity Acres men while visiting the Richland Cemetery several summers ago.*] The need for Unity Acres' own cemetery on our own land had become pressing. John assisted Father McVey in getting our cemetery opened in 1977, on low ridge overlooking Trout Brook and lined with tall maple and pine trees – clearing the land, plotting the rows, and overcoming whatever bureaucratic obstacles there were. Today, this cemetery has become the final resting place for 200 of deceased residents and volunteers and friends, a quiet, still spot, a place of peace and beauty. John handled arrangements for the great majority of these 200 funerals and burials conducted at Unity Acres during nearly forty years. He cut most of the grave markers as well. Thank you John, for all that you have done here.

What a pleasure John was to work with: accommodating, charming, very, very witty, and precise. We are grateful for his service to our community. Father Jones celebrated John's memorial service at Sacred Heart Chapel on Sunday, December 20, 2009.

During the early morning of December 30, a fire at a motel in Pulaski took the life of one of Unity Acres' long-time community members, ROBERT M. GODFREY. Bob had only a scant few days before left the Acres in order to take up residence in the neighboring town, as was his habit to do during the past several years. Bob had first come to Unity Acres in 1987. And like many of our residents, he had left and returned to the Acres on several occasions during the intervening years. Bob was a quiet and polite man, a reader. In looking at the index card that was filled out at the time of his first admission to the Acres, I recognize Carol Guthrie's hand-writing, and read Bob's replies to a few simple questions, his name, his place and date of birth, and so on, and in Father McVey's writing Bob's next of kin, a father, two sisters. Bob was sixty-eight at the time of his death.

Due to the circumstances, the State Troopers were in touch with us for information. Did we know whom to contact? Bob's surviving family are in another state, and were unable to assist in making arrangements for the funeral, but were willing to allow Unity Acres the honor and privilege to do so. We are of course always happy to render this last service to any of our deceased men. Father Jones celebrated a memorial mass for Robert on January 6. He will be buried at Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery during the spring.

Let us pray for the happy repose of the souls of John and Robert. May God give them a merciful judgment and grant them eternal rest.

Steve Dickhout

2009 Building Project Summary

We are pleased to give our friends a report on the projects that were completed in the summer and fall of 2009. Many of these planned projects were announced at our support members meeting in June, and also mentioned in our August newsletter. Some of the projects completed were added later as our needs saw fit. Our main goal this year was to focus on energy saving projects, thereby reducing our energy consumption, and to see quick returns on our investments. I hope the following text will not be too boring for our readers.

Infirmary Building

- Second floor resident's room ceiling framed, insulated and sheet rock hung. The room had a drop ceiling in poor shape and we were losing heat. Ed D, Ben A, John S and Will W did a great job.
- Eight (8) new energy efficient windows were installed on the second floor. The old windows were French style and were beyond repair. Thanks go to Jim Brown for the installation, even though he wasn't feeling well.
- An additional six (6) inches of blown in insulation was put in the second floor attic. The attic had only 6-8" inches before the improvement.
- Another twelve (12) inches of blown in insulation was put in the first floor attic. A good part of the area had only four (4) inches of insulation, one area had none at all. Thanks go to Jim Brown, Roger I and John M for both these insulation projects.
- New building siding has been put up and was caulked, primed and painted. The East side is about 95% complete. Great siding job by Gary T, and painting by Mark D and Sean M.
- An updated television antenna was installed along with a proper grounding rod. Updated antenna cable was also run to each individual room. The switch to digital TV has been challenging for us, mainly due to our distance from the Syracuse broadcasts. Thanks go to Steve D for all the time and effort to complete this.
- Hot water pipes and tanks were insulated in the Infirmary basement. Mark B saw this through.

A Building

- An additional twelve (12) inches of blown in insulation was put in the attic. Jim Brown, Roger I and John M did a great Job!
- Hallways, bathrooms, railings, doors, floors, and trim work on all three floors have been painted. Real nice job, thanks go to Mark D and Joe C.
- The chimney did not get repaired this year because of time restraints and the high cost of a man lift.
- A digital antenna was mounted on the roof: and all new antenna cable put in. Super job by Steve D!

B Building

- New fiberglass double doors have been installed for our main entrance. The old doors were rusting and were not very energy-efficient. Ed D, Don N and Gary T – Great job guys!
- The wheelchair ramp foundation has been reinforced. The foundation walls were crumbling from years of snow and ice buildup. Also a sidewalk section pad was poured. Thanks go to Mark C and Mark D and Gary T for their hard work.
- A lot of door hardware has been replaced so doors shut and latch properly. Ed D was responsible for completing this as well as the next project listed.
- Two shower stalls have been repaired and are now in good working order.
- The chimney has been repaired including proper flue piping installed. Thank you to Ralph Eastman.

Star Building (Kitchen & Dining Hall)

- The entire roof has been coated with a fibered aluminum roof coating. Thank you Mark D and Mark M for the hard work in the hot weather.
- Metal doors that were worn out have been replaced and other doors repaired. Thanks to Ed D for all your time and effort!
- Twelve (12) inch thick ceiling insulation panels were installed in the dining room, kitchen and recreation room. We have had problems with ice formation on the edges of the roof due to heat loss and water would leak into the dining room and kitchen. Great job by Jim Brown. Bill K and Billy C working around meals and getting the job done so quickly.

Projects completed are very important, but day to day jobs are very important as well. A very special thanks goes to all the men who work very hard every day to make Unity Acres the great place that it is.

Mark Baker

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January Prayer:
New Year, New Decade

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*"Behold, I make all things new... I am the first and the last, the beginning and the end." –
Rev. 21: 2. 5-6.*

*"O Lord, eternally God, a thousand years to You is like one day, like a short hour in the
night... Teach us to number our days aright, that we may become wise." – Ps. 90: 2. 4. 12*

God of all times and places, another year has passed. How quickly! As we begin a new year, we ask your blessings. We turn to you, who "make all things new," to renew our lives, our faith, our spirit.

Help us to gently release the year(s) now past. And we do so in prayer.

First of all we thank you for the many blessings you have given us at Unity Acres. In this our 40th anniversary year, you have sent countless gifts: of people, support, joy and encouragement. We truly celebrate your presence through these years.

And we also ask for your mercy. Forgive any way in which our human sinfulness resisted your grace, diminished your gifts.

Many loved ones this year know the shortness of our days, as you called them to their eternal home. May they rest in your peace. And yes, Lord, we grieve; but even so, may we learn wisdom of heart, peace of mind. We give thanks for the gifts of all of them have been to us, to the Acres.

Spirit of God, we pray, guide us through the year 2010. We trust in you to "make all things new" for us – in our prayers, works, and all our circumstances.

All praise to you, eternal God, this year and forever! Amen.

Father Robert Jones