

March, 1989

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

On March 3rd, 1969, 20 years ago, we arrived in Northern Oswego County, in the unheard Hamlet of Orwell. Five very trusting men accompanied me on the journey. Peter McCole moved our belongings and Kate Stanton came with food that our every so faithful food teams had brought to her at her home on Rich Street.

This move was something like the Israelites leaving Egypt. The city was slavery, the streets, depression, alcohol, drugs, jail and the endless cycle would start again. A trap, a web from which there was no escape for so many hurting people.

In asking the Bishop to begin our first little house on Chester St. only one year before our Exodus I had no plan except to be "one with" as Jesus asked us and Himself, let go of His divinity so as to be "one with us" and He was and is "crushed in infirmity" -- so much does He love us. His chosen people reckoned Him among the wicked and killed Him. His one desire was and is to be one with us so as to make us one with our Father. He took His place with the oppressed, the infirm, the rejected, the scorned and condemned of our brothers and sisters and then invited all persons of all times to come and dwell with Him. If you will have life come, deny your very self, take up your cross and follow in my footsteps. I will never abandon you, I am with you. The world will hate you as it hated me before you because the world loves what is its own, and you do not belong to this world any more than I belong to this world. I wanted to respond to Jesus' call. No salary, no plan, no rehabilitation - I just wanted to be with Jesus in His hidden disguise. Because it was so loose ended Bishop Foery said no, I cannot give permission. I knew this was God's Way for me and I told the Bishop I simply must do this. He said in conscience he could not allow it but to go to Bishop Cunningham the following day and whatever decision he made he would go along with. I walked the floor all night so strong did I feel about this so much did I fear another "no". I was shocked when the next morning Bishop Cunningham said yes, you have my full support.

I remember just a year and a half before that asking to leave St. James and go to St. Lucy's for just the same reason - to be one with. Now I dreamt of going back to St. James and all other suburban parishes and inviting them to be "one with". Carol and Jerry Berrigan, Peter and Ellie McCole, Martin and Erica Wall, Janet Pisano and Jean Shemly all teamed us with Kate Stanton and the every present support of Fr. Ted Sizing and the whole very rapid ground swell began -- for one purpose -- to be one with.

There was no Jail Ministry then and trips to the jail and courts were daily occurrences. The first man to stay in the house was D. Lawson, a beautiful man who loved his family and was just being released from Jamesville because of his heroin addiction. We climbed from one to twenty in a matter of weeks. Bill Waelder came down and built floor to ceiling bunks in the living room so we could be one with. Carol quickly called countless families and invited them to cook a meal and come and eat with us. Every day we enjoyed a beautiful meal with a family who wanted to be one with us.

Within 6 months the house simply could not hold us as we moved to 109 Huron St. hoping to buy it. The fun days of Chester St. were over and life at Huron St. became rapidly unbearable. The supportive community grew in size and dedication but the numbers of hurting broken, addicted and despised people made our lives unlivable. The intent to be one with never diminished and experiencing the pain of slavery, a web from which men could not escape I began to dream of more peaceful days when I was first ordained a priest and sent to St. John's in Pulaski. I remembered the old abandoned tuberculosis sanitarium so peacefully situated in the beautiful countryside in Orwell. Peter McCole, Cornelius Hurley, Kate Stanton and I trekked up to take a look. Without doubt we knew this must somehow become our new home and invite all who wish to come leave the inhuman slavery of the city streets and experience the peace that God intended for all of us. I called Dorothy Day on the phone and Kate and Sister Doreen went to see her. She said it would never work. She came to the Acres on three occasions and sent little notes of encouragement very often.

Again the same blind determination accompanied this dream and also the obstacles "It must happen and we have no time to wait". We really felt so much pain; "to be one with". Violence was common, stealing more than common life was plain and simply inhuman. How could anyone survive? And yet we must be "one with". It is only in feeling the pain fully that we can be driven to do justice and in the process the established order of legalities takes a back sit. Things got so bad at Huron St. that I announced to everyone that we were moving in one week and all were welcome to make the Exodus. The following week only five of the 30 men chose to come. The problem was that we had no deed to the property and Dick Love, our patient volunteer lawyer had no idea when we would have a right to come. We had bought the mortgage for \$7,000.00 with no money and Frank Woolever, simply on faith, took out a bank loan for us. We were still in the process of negotiating the property and had no right to move in until this was accomplished.

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We moved as scheduled without a deed and two weeks later a state trooper came to the door and told us to be out by morning or we were all going to jail. The very trap we finally had escaped from was upon us again.

We had no telephone so we went to Pulaski to a pay phone and called everyone we knew. To return to the city was out of the question. The house on Huron St. was already vandalized beyond repair. Our faithful loving "one with" friends made countless phone calls and finally come up with a camp on Millsite Lake 35 miles north of Orwell owned by Bud Adams. Bud gave permission for us to migrate to his camp but at that stage we could not worry about little things like keys so north we went just ahead of the State trooper's zero hour.

We were at Millsite just about one week when we learned we needed and \$2,000. immediately if we were to obtain the deed. Then the memorable day -- we started at 8:00 A.M. and needed \$2,000.00 by the end of the day. "Sorry, no time for mailing it, we needed it in hand or the deal might take months to be finalized. Whoever was called was asked to call others and please deliver. By 5:00 P.M. we had \$2,000. in hand. The impossible had happened. The next day we obtained the deed and came home at last". The exodus was finally accomplished. In a short time Paul Naughton came on the scene helped at the Acres and teamed up with Bob Russell and Dick Keough in starting Unity Kitchen in Syracuse. Men who came to Unity Acres here knew well how much they were needed and pitched in to fix roofs, boilers, replace worn out electrical systems, paint, build, clean, cook, maintain the unmaintainable, etc. God has blessed us and continues to bless us with each and every person who comes. We fail to involve every man as in earlier days and that is an important part of "one with". Lord, help and guide us.

Now, 20 years later, we are celebrating with deeply grateful and humble hearts. We have been called to be "one with" literally thousands of men since that memorable day and thousands of loving friends have chosen to be one with us and have lovingly supplied our every need.

The call is no different than it was 20 years ago "to be one with". Hundreds of men have died and with each man a sense of inadequacy. I, we, could have been more "one with". Yes, the call of Jesus is the same, my response and, yes, our response is all to weighed down in human frailty. There is the beautiful peace and quiet of the country but it means little if we allow ourselves to stray from the one call of Jesus.

Lord, we thank you for providing all. Our very life blood is your merciful love. You are "one with us" Help us to be faithful and be "one with you" in each every one of our hurting brothers and sisters.

As you so well know the changes over 20 years have been many. We grew to 180 men and 7 families before our fire in 1972. The families gradually resettled and finally a small family center was set up in Richland. Our capacity now at the Acres is 130 men with very adequate space living in our community.

Taking the risk of writing a book rather than a monthly newsletter I will continue to dream with you. Please bear with me.

The dream of living "one with" must become reality in our lives. Indeed it was in the very early years. Numbers make this very difficult but not impossible. Numbers are a call to each of us to respond so that we can be really "one with". Unity Acres is a call to the need of small houses of "one with" hospitality. A Christ room in every home. Let's dream! In what way can I go and be "one with" and, feeling the pain, take some action to eliviate it, not so much to "do for" but to "be with".

It has become very clear that parish houses of hospitality will not come into being through consensus of a parish or even of a parish council. They will come into being through the obedience of one or two with no plans or preconceived formats - only a willingness and desire to "be with" others who are on the fringe of society. Others within and outside the parish will come forth. God will provide with overflowing abundance when we cease discussing, worrying, calculating and each person within the parish community listening and obeying and calling out for help when as "one with" you are living the suffering of others.

One such house has been in existence since last May within Holy Cross parish. Three persons have died, loved and one, with the community within the house and those one with the house. Another man is living at the house suffering with a terminal illness. Several men formerly on the fringes are living within our family. They indeed are "one with". Jesus was obedient to His Father and it was the will of His Father that He would lose no one -- that all who believe be "one with". As the Father has sent Jesus now Jesus sends us if only as His beloved ones we believe and obey. The Gospel will not be lived by consensus but by obedience prompted by faith.

How tragic what we hear and see happening in the world and look to government to remedy the sin. We, meaning disciples of Jesus Christ. Yes, we dream and experience the oneness of the disciples at Jesus Transfiguration and fail to hear our Father's words "listen to Him". They finally heard Jesus by His gift of the Holy Spirit and obeyed experiencing with joy rejection, disdain, aloneness, falling, with all the other non-citizens of this world, those carefully kept on the fringes.

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So the dream is the same today but all the more intensified. Parish community by parish community, disciples within communities following Jesus' very personal call, denying themselves, taking up their cross and following Him. He will do the rest. Again, and I will end here, the Paschal Mystery is not lived by consensus but by obedient faith response. It does not mean we stand apart from the Body. Love always those who do not agree and perhaps judge and condemn you, but obey we must. The Paschal Mystery is just that -- a mystery of life through death, of being loved, believing and obeying.

Thank you Lord for the countless blessings of the last 20 years. Every person you value without our ability to even comprehend. We ask your mercy for not letting go as you let, so as to be one with us. Thank you for your precious gift of life and humbly ask your outpouring of the Holy Spirit in obedient faithfilled hearts.

OUR SINCERE HEARTFELT GRATITUDE, SO SELDOM EXPRESSED, TO ALL, AND MAY GOD GRANT ETERNAL ONENESS, TO SO MANY WHO HAVE DONE SO MUCH AND HAVE DIED DURING THESE PAST 20 YEARS.

Father McVey

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PLEASE PRAY FOR THE BLESSED REPOSE OF THE SOUL OF ERNEST CLEMENT WHO DIED AT THE ACRES. ERNEST COULD NOT MIX MUCH BECAUSE OF ILL HEALTH. AGAIN, THE AWARENESS -- WE COULD HAVE BEEN MORE "ONE WITH" AS JESUS ASKS US. HE LOVED US AND REFUSED TO GO INTO AN ADULT HOME. HE FELT MORE AT HOME HERE. NOW, LORD, MAY ERNEST TRULY BE AT HOME IN YOUR LOVE.

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PLEASE PRAY FOR OUR FRIENDS IN HOSPITALS AND NURSING HOMES:

WILLIE COOK - HILLCREST NURSING HOME, ELLEN ST., OSWEGO, N.Y., 13126

ARTHUR FRANCE - HARWOOD NURSING HOME, SUNRISE DRIVE, OSWEGO, N.Y.,  
13126

JOSEPH GARRETT - MICHAUD NURSING HOME, SOUTH 6TH ST., FULTON, N.Y.,  
13069

WILLIE MOORE - SYRACUSE VETERAN'S HOSPITAL, 800 IRVING AVE., SYR., NY  
13210

BILL COSGROVE - ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL, 301 PROSPECT AVE., SYR., N.Y.,  
13203

RAYMOND MANTOR, ST. JOSEPH'S HOSPITAL, 301 PROSPECT AVE., SYR., N.Y.,  
13203