

Unity Acres

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Greetings of Summer to All the Friends of Unity Acres!

We are delighted to greet you in this newsletter and thank you for your continued interest and support for this gift of God called Unity Acres!

We apologize for our lack of communication in these months, but there have been a variety of challenging circumstances that pushed this correspondence in the background, but we promise to do better!

Briefly, due to the generosity of so many - including an extremely generous bequest - we will be able to do a variety of repairs that will enrich the lives of the residents and make the Acres ever more sound and some of our buildings brought more into the physical state that we all would wish. The Members and the Board at our meeting on June 15 approved these expenditures unanimously and look forward to seeing the work begin this summer.

Unfortunately, that will mean that we will not be able to have our usual Picnic in August, but have scheduled a FALL FESTIVAL celebration at the Acres on September 21. This will be a wonderful occasion to share the Eucharist, celebrate with the men, appreciate a fine meal, and realize that the Spirit continues to move in this place — now in its 45th year!

Some of us "oldtimers" still remember when Father McVey began this miracle with just a few hearty souls who accompanied him to this site that was in disrepair, but had such potential. Many of you who have received this newsletter for years know that he was later joined by Kate Stanton who proved to be such a great anchor of sense and efficiency that complemented his idealism with a practicality that allowed this unique "Catholic Worker" model institution to survive and thrive!

Some of us know of the many moments of challenge and transitions in style and leadership, but yet with a rootedness in the Gospel and in the simple rules of "No fighting and no drinking (or drugging)." Certainly there have had to be some hard decision made and some persons have had to leave for violations of these, but on the whole, there has been a remarkable spirit of peace that can only be attributed to the caring staff and especially the Holy Spirit!

We hope in the course of this year to re-acquaint some of you with those stories of the "Men of the Acres" as they allow us to share them and to introduce others of you to some persons and stories you would never know. We believe that this little jewel that has been entrusted to this area and to all who care about it needs to have the constant reinforcement and replenishment that comes from your interest, prayers, and contributions.

Thank you for continuing to be supportive of this nationally unique commitment to Christian life with men who have struggled and know that YOU are always welcome to arrange a visit to Unity Acres to see how the Holy Spirit continues to inspire us all in creating a community that truly is a sign of the Kingdom.

God bless you!

Dave Pasinski
Board Member

"If the Lord does not build the house,
then in vain do the builders labor." - *Psalm*

127,1

Heavenly Father, we give you grateful
praise for Unity Acres, where men are
offered a home, healing and hope.

Peace and security are gifts that you
give us, Lord.

Countless people have been vital
elements in its history. We give thanks,
O God, for calling Father McVey and
Kate Stanton to begin this "Place of
Miracles." We thank you, too, for
giving and inspiring all who have followed.

May we always, as a community, be a
source of renewal of "Body, Mind, and
Spirit."

We entrust our home and ourselves to
your loving care.

All praise and honor to you, God,
Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

"And what does the Lord require of
you? To act justly, to love tenderly,
and to walk humbly with your God." -

Micah 6, 8

- *Father Robert Jones*

We marked the 45th anniversary of the
establishment of Unity Acres, rather quietly
this year, on Monday, March 3rd. Varying the
usual daily and weekly schedules a little,
Father Jones celebrated Mass at our Sacred
Heart Chapel that morning at 11 AM. Later in
the day, the whole community of men and
staff gathered again in the chapel for a brief
meeting the purpose of which was to remind
one another of the circumstances of the
founding of the Acres by Father Raymond
McVey back in 1969, and of the 'Aims and
Purposes' of Unity Acres as these were first
articulated and by which our little community
continues to function even today.

On March 3, 1969 - in my imagination, a
cold & snowy day - Father McVey,
accompanied by five very trusting men,
travelled north from Syracuse, to take
possession of the disused Oswego County TB
Sanatorium, and to make for themselves a
home there, a place of refuge and sanctuary
and healing. By then a dream had taken
shape: having experienced the frustrations
of the poor of the inner-city neighborhoods,
the time had come for these first few men to
leave behind the troubles and temptations
and the lonely desperation of the streets.

The purpose of Unity Acres, since then
and against the odds, has been to create a
place of safety for homeless men, and 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.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

In gathering the men in the chapel or dining hall, for an infrequent or brief and impromptu meeting, there will usually be a quite practical agenda at hand: discussion with the men about problems with the septic system, or a presentation about better nutrition, are some recent examples.

On the occasion of our 45th anniversary, however, we wanted to share with the men something touching more on the spirit of the Acres. As the Acres has grown and evolved and changed over the years, to adjust to ever-shifting circumstances, we have from time to time found it necessary to revisit, revise, and also re-affirm certain foundational principles and concepts. One of the key concepts emphasized that day was suggested by the psalm designated in the lectionary for the date of our anniversary, Psalm 111: "He will be ever mindful of his *covenant*..."

Between 78 and 55 men are living at Unity Acres on any given day. Those who are capable assist in the great variety of tasks that allow the day-to-day functioning of Unity Acres to continue. Those who have an income share to help defray expenses. Those who have no other income receive a small daily cash gratuity.

The community at Unity Acres promises each man who joins us the bodily necessities. In turn, each one joining the community in effect agrees to help keep the peace that is given to him, by refraining from the use of alcohol or drugs, from avoiding violence in word or in deed, by helping out with chores, and so on. This exchange of promises is fundamentally a covenant, a covenant which entails mutual obligations and support, and creates a common life: community.

Another aspect of 'building community' is the role played by our donors and benefactors: Unity Acres has also been envisioned from its beginnings in 1969 as a place where people of faith could put into practice the works of mercy.

To meet the on-going needs of the men, to provide food, clothing and shelter, we rely on a truly provident God, who sends us our needs by the hands of you who are receiving this letter, our benefactors. Because of your donations, there is abundant food on the shelves of our pantry. Our clothing room is well-stocked. The men are well-fed and dressed. And we are grateful, for your support, and for being part of our wider community.

BUILDING A PLACE OF SAFETY: SOME PRACTICAL ASPECTS

Dave Pasinski's letter of greeting and thanks on page 1 alludes to certain needed improvements to the buildings that have been projected for the current year. These improvements were proposed as part of a plan announced in the fall of 2011 to enhance the comfort and safety of our residents by ensuring that the buildings at Unity Acres remain

structurally sound and serviceable long into the future. We have received many kind and thoughtful responses to that and subsequent appeals.

Improvements to the buildings and the grounds have been an unending preoccupation for us here at the Acres for a few related reasons. The buildings we occupy are old. All of the residential buildings on the grounds of Unity Acres were originally constructed during the 1910s, the '20s and the '30s; the 'Star' Building was constructed in the early 1970s to house the kitchen and dining hall. There are also a few out-buildings that the men themselves have constructed during the past few years: a tractor barn, a maintenance building, a pig barn.

Cold temperatures and bad weather delayed the start-up of the major projects that we have planned for 2014. When we decided last summer and fall to focus attention and efforts on the Star Building, we did not foresee the bad effects of the past winter's heavy snowfalls on the roof. During January and February small and scattered damp spots penetrating through the ceiling tiles in the dining hall yielded to steady, continuous dripping and leaking through the roof, punctuated by the occasional sudden disintegration of ceiling tiles, which in breaking apart finally fall onto the tables and floor below with a damp and disheartening thud, followed by sopping wet bales of ruined fiberglass insulation.

In light of the above, the first step in organizing the needed repairs to the Star Building is to replace the badly deteriorated and damaged steel roof. We have had a few contractors look over the roof, and have received recommendations and bids, and now after having reviewed these bids and recommendations we are on the point of signing a contract. We hope to have the work under way shortly. After the roof has been repaired, we will be able to proceed with the replacement of windows, floor tiles, and so on.

THE WORKS OF MERCY: BURYING THE DEAD

Burying the dead is the last of the bodily works of mercy which we are able to provide to our brothers and sisters. There have been several deaths among the men since the last newsletter: BARTHOLOMEW MCNAMARA, LEWIS SCHREIBER, LUTHER DUNBAR, DENNIS MURRAY and JOSEPH GALANTE, all in 2013; and more recently MARK RESSNER, and EDWARD WESTMAN in 2014, all of whom were buried in our Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery; and finally, CHARLES DOXTATER whose remains were at last taken home to Akwesasne.

Please remember all of these, along with stalwart and true friends of Unity Acres: John Donnelly and Betty Belge. May they be greeted by the Angels in Heaven and be escorted to a place of refreshment and peace. AMEN.

Steve Dickhout