

Unity Acres

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*Patently all flesh looks toward You,
to feed them in due season,
satisfying every need,
You feed them with a generous,
outstretched hand.*

Psalm 145, 15-16

Dear Friends,

Early Monday, an exceptionally bright, clear, still, and very cold January morning – heavy snow blankets the ground, and only a few hardy souls are venturing outside at this early hour. In the field belonging to Bear Foote, and just to the west of the Unity Acres property, a flock of perhaps as many as 30 wild turkeys are foraging through the snow – as they've been doing all winter – for whatever kernels of corn were dropped to the ground during the fall harvest.

Our pathways and driveways are carefully shoveled and plowed. Here and there a few footprints are to be seen in the light dusting of last night's fresh-fallen snow: the footprints of the night-watchman making rounds during the nighttime hours, of the breakfast cooks and kitchen staff having made their way to the 'Star' Building in order to prepare the first meal of the day, and finally, of early risers making their way to the Canteen for a cup of coffee, and pawprints marking the varied excursions of Cujo the dog and of our several cats.

GRATITUDE:

Unity Acres was envisioned from its beginning in 1969 by its founder, Father Raymond McVey, as a place of refuge for homeless men where people of faith could put into practice the works of mercy. For more than 40 years, Unity Acres has been a sign of hope for the men who have received hospitality here, as well as for those who have assisted in keeping Father Ray's dream alive.

Throughout the past year, between 70 and 78 men have been living at Unity Acres on any given day; each one provided with food, clothing and shelter. Upon arriving at the Acres, each new resident is assigned one of the seven beds in our Dormitory – better known here as the 'Dungeon'. After 14 days residence in the Dorm, a new resident will be eligible to be moved to a small private room. 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. Men receive assistance in establishing eligibility for health insurance, and with arranging transportation to their medical appointments, and with distribution of their medications, as needed. The Eucharist is celebrated on a regular basis in our Sacred Heart Chapel; an AA group meets twice weekly in the Dining Hall.

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 our benefactors, 'agents of an all-nourishing bounty, conforming to the wish of those in need' (*Wisdom 16,25*). There is abundant food on the shelves of our pantry, our fuel tanks have been filled. Our clothing room is well-stocked. We are well-fed and dressed and staying warm. We are grateful.

During the last several weeks and months, as you may remember, Unity Acres' Fund-Raiser Committee had issued an appeal for assistance in obtaining a new van. We were facing

the needs of replacing our old van – a 10-year-old Chevrolet Express Van – and hoped to be able to purchase another good, low-mileage, used van. We were very gratified at the response with which our appeal was met, and in the end, we were able to buy a new van, also Chevrolet Express Van, but this time, one with All-Wheel Drive. With the AWD, our drivers' weekly trips into Syracuse and around Onondaga County for groceries and other supplies will be safer during snowy and inclement weather. Again, our thanks to all who contributed to the effort!

CELEBRATION:

In addition to meeting the exigencies of our day-to-day routines, during the past year, the Unity Acres Community – residents, board and staff members, and our extended family of supporters – gathered together on several occasions throughout the year to celebrate. We celebrated together Father Jones' 50th Anniversary of Ordination and the rededication of our Sacred Heart Chapel on June 16th. Our chapel was filled with residents and visitors on both occasions, and following Mass each the assembly was re-convened in the Dining Hall for a shared meal.

During the intervening spring months, following our celebration of Father Jones' Anniversary, the chapel itself underwent extensive renovation. This project was the major focus of the activities of the men and the staff during the first half of 2010. Signs of wear & tear in the chapel had slowly multiplied: wallpaper was coming loose at the seams, floor tiles were badly scuffed, pews and kneelers were in need of repair. Renovation work began on February 3rd, and continued until a few weeks before the date of the chapel's rededication in June. Walls were repainted, pews stripped, and a new floor installed. Yet to be accomplished is the installation of replacement windows in the chapel.

On April 22, our Unity Acres Community gathered at LeMoyne Manor in Liverpool for our Annual Spring Fund-Raiser Dinner, *Celebrating Unity Acres' 41 Years*. We celebrated that evening as well the lives and witness of our dear friends, Jerry & Carol Berrigan, honorees that evening. Father Peter Young – founder of the Altamont Program – was our guest speaker. Our Annual Family Picnic on August 15 was well-attended – as several remarked, perhaps our best picnic yet! The theme of the Mass and the day was: Perseverance.

During the month of December, we received so many kindnesses from well-wishers, visitors, benefactors and so on, that it is difficult to be able even to begin to express adequately our thanks for all that we have received. We celebrate the holiday season at the Acres each year with the usual preparations: the advent wreath is placed in the chapel, and eventually, the manger scene is set up in front of the altar, along with any number of poinsettia plants. On a Wednesday evening in mid-December, the Altar & Rosary Society of Christ Our Light Parish in Pulaski serve their annual Christmas dinner; in advance of which, the dining hall is assiduously cleaned and decorated.

During the days and weeks before Christmas eve, gifts have been delivered to the Acres from any numbers of individuals and churches. These are assembled in the Brick Building, sorted and sized, and after many hours are spent putting together gift packages for each of our current residents – and those now in nursing homes – we are ready for the distribution of the gifts on Christmas eve following a very good spaghetti dinner. Christmas Day, Father Jones celebrated Mass at our Sacred Heart Chapel.

In looking over our daily log-book for the past several weeks, and comparing those notes with our post-Christmas newsletters of the past several years, we see the repetition of the names of many parishes and other organizations, which have so faithfully made Unity Acres part of their celebration of the Christmas holidays over many years. Similarly, in looking at the many Christmas cards received during late November and throughout December, we see many, many very familiar names, who have made Unity Acres part of their Christmas tradition as well. And

so we wish to thank you all for your kindness and generosity in thinking of Unity Acres, and our men, during the Christmas holidays.

UPDATES:

2010 was a year of celebration for Unity Acres; it has been a year of change and loss as well.

The changes, first: Laura and Mark left their positions at Unity Acres during the summer months, while Bear Foote and Loretta Dickhout (Steve's mother) have joined the staff. Bear Foote is the owner of the corn field and other adjoining land to the west of the Acres mentioned in the first paragraph of this newsletter. As a neighbor, he had been first an occasion visitor to Unity Acres, then after a time, a frequent presence, spending many hours helping in the clothing room. By mid-summer, it was the natural thing to ask Bear simply to 'move in', and being the good sport that he is, he did! Bear is assisting in many capacities, and is a diligent worker and a constant and reassuring presence. In Loretta's case, she has resumed her place on the staff, having now had a role at the Acres as long-time and long-term volunteer for more than fifteen years. She is supervising and co-ordinating medical care for our residents who require assistance in that regard.

Losses: During 2010, we mourned the loss of several residents and former residents: Tom Wojcukiewicz and Mike Pawlewitz, then during the space of a few short weeks during June and July, Gary Thurston, Billy O'Day, and Larry Burch, and later during the summer, John Abel. Gary, Billy and Larry were each current residents of the Acres, and were buried at our Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery.



More recently, we received word that Arthur Conant passed away at Oswego Hospital on January 22. Art had lived at the Acres during several years from the late 1990s until 2003, but had been residing more recently at the Springbrook senior citizens apartments in Pulaski. While a resident at the Acres, Art served in the 'Canteen' – in the space that's now the coffee room. The Canteen in those days was operated as a diner-type gathering place available for the residents. Art took his responsibilities in the Canteen seriously, prepared good food for the men, and was very well-liked. His funeral is scheduled for Saturday, January 30 in our chapel. Burial at Saint Martin's, during the spring.

Lastly, we must pass on sad news concerning Father Jones' brother Bill and sister Betty Kroth. Bill Jones died at Crouse Hospital after a brief illness on December 15. Shortly afterwards, on January 2, Betty succumbed to an illness with which she struggled for many years. We commend them, and Father Jones, to your prayers.

Steve Dickhout

January Prayer

(This prayer is in Thanksgiving for the comfort given to my family on the death of my brother and sister – Fr. J.)

“The Lord has sent me to heal the broken-hearted... to comfort all who mourn, to give joy and gladness instead of grief, a song of praise instead of sorrow.” –/isaiah 61: 1,3

Creator God, I thank you. You sent me to help us in our time of loss. We were brought very low by the death of my brother, Bill, and my sister, Betty. But You raise us up. Through the love, compassion and help of so many, You even now are healing our broken hearts. In the outpouring of prayers, sympathy and helpfulness, You – and Your people – give us joy and gladness instead of grief.

In this time of human loss, You have sent your people. Moved by Your Spirit, and by their love, we will sing a song of praise in spite of the sorrow. May all of us hear your call, respond, and be blessed for their healing love. Amen.

Father Robert Jones