

Unity Acres
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40th Anniversary

Thursday evening
December 10, 2009

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

During the course of any given day, week, month or season, the men and the staff of Unity Acres find ourselves caught up in the minutiae of planning and preparations for the provision of our on-going day-to-day necessities: purchasing food, and preparing meals; ordering medications, making transportation arrangements for men going to medical appointments; bringing in, splitting and stacking firewood, and so on. At specific times of the year, there is planning and preparation to be done for the annual picnic, for fund-raiser dinners, for building and maintenance projects, and many other activities too numerous to enumerate.

The current season of Advent is especially a time of preparation. We prepare ourselves for the coming of the Lord at Christmas. The readings at Mass and the liturgy help us to make ourselves ready to celebrate the commemoration of Jesus' birth in history at Bethlehem, but also for the eventual coming of Christ in great power at the end of the age.

Still, there are very mundane aspects to the Advent preparations that we go through each year. Well before the First Sunday of Advent, we begin to receive phone calls and emails requesting that we send on lists of items needed for our celebration of Christmas: gifts for the men, personal care items, and food for the holiday meals. The date and the menu for the annual Altar and Rosary Society Christmas dinner for our men are set. (Just now, a woman from the Oswego Elks Auxiliary has arrived in the midst of an early winter snow storm with a load of wrapped gifts, and coffee and sugar, and some warm winter coats; yesterday someone brought freshly baked Christmas cookies from a group at the Orwell Methodist Church. Yum!)

On the Friday before the First Sunday of Advent, the purple altar linens are sorted out and the green linens for Ordinary Time are put away. The missalettes for Advent are set out in the pews. The Nativity Set made and donated by Carol Guthrie many years ago is retrieved from its boxes in the designated 'Christmas Room' - a little storage area in the basement of the Main Building.

This year, Roger has made to make a last minute repair to one of the shepherds and the figurines are put away in boxes under the altar, and Gary has agreed to rebuild the crèche.

Almost everything is in readiness for Sunday's mass, until eventually one hears the question, 'Where is the Advent wreath? Where are the purple candles for the wreath?' After

much searching, a shoe box full of tapers is discovered in the back of the closet in Father Jones' sacristy. To our dismay, the box is full of pink candles, but contains only stubs of mismatched purple candles. A brief foray to the shops in nearby Pulaski reveals that there are no purple candles suitable for our Advent Wreath to be found.

After much discussion as to possible alternatives – white candles with ribbons, blue candles – the final decision is made to send to Central Square for the traditional purple and pink candles.

On November 25, the day before Thanksgiving, Mike Ferris's mother called us with the sad news that Mike had died in a Binghamton Hospital.

Mike has been one of our residents for several years who would stay with us for a few months and then leave for a few months. He always would call us when away to keep in touch. He had called about 2-3 months ago from Tennessee and was planning on coming back soon. When Mike was here he would immediately pitch in and help wherever he was needed. He had a very pleasant personality, was helpful and respectful.

Mike will be buried in the spring in Cortland in a grave that will be next to his beloved grandmother. Rest in peace Mike, you will be missed here.

Today at Mass, two of the purple candles were burning. This Sunday, Gaudete Sunday, the third candle, the pink candle will be lit.

To be sure, we experience difficulties and setbacks, but we have much to rejoice at, despite occasional difficulties and sorrows: we have rewarding work, and many hands capable of accomplishing that work; we have caring friends and neighbors; there is food in the pantry; we are staying warm despite the intemperate weather.

The pink candle which is to be lit on Gaudete Sunday represents joy. The First Reading at Mass, taken from the Prophet Zephaniah will begin: *"Shout for joy, O daughter Zion! Sing joyfully, O Israel! Be glad and exult with all your heart! ... The Lord is in your midst, you have no further misfortune to fear."* The Second Reading from Philippians will begin: *"Rejoice in the Lord always..."* In the midst of this

introspective season, this season of penitence and patient waiting, there is joy and anticipation, and expectation of the fulfillment of the Promise made to Mary. (Luke 1, 45)

Our solitary pink candle soon to be burning brightly amidst its purple neighbors represents joy in the midst of expectation, penitence, sorrow. The troubles and strife, the sorrows of the world as we know it, are tempered by joy.

At Christmas, the abyss separating God from men and women is closed in the person of Jesus, in His weakness and vulnerability. Time and eternity commingle in an infant begotten of God, and Light enters the world.

On behalf of everyone at Unity Acres, may you enjoy a Blessed Christmas; may His coming bring you Light, and His Blessing bring you peace.

Stephen Dickhout

Thanksgiving 2009

Once the last morsel has been eaten, the last dish washed and put away, the last visitor departed for home, we always seem to heave a sigh and say, “Well, I think this was the best Christmas, the best picnic, or the best Thanksgiving ever!”

This November, we were able to say, without too much fear of contradiction, that this was the best Thanksgiving ever.

During the weeks preceding Thanksgiving Day, we received several large donations of food items intended for our celebration of the holiday. Turkeys from Dave M from Oswego. A truck-load of food from parishioners of Our Lady of Perpetual Help in Minetto. Two cars full of turkeys – 28, in fact! – driven up by Jeff, Fran and Tony of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton in Baldwinsville.

We had also received word that Jim F, one of our former residents now settled in Oswego, wanted to spend the week of Thanksgiving as a volunteer cook. In fact, Jim cooked 12 Turkeys for Thanksgiving Day, and used 10 ½ of them to serve the noon meal!

The morning of Thanksgiving Day, we began our celebration at Mass at 11 AM. Upon entering the chapel, Father Jones was, I believe, somewhat surprised at the crowded pews. A family of fourteen – grandchildren to grandparents – had decided to spend their Thanksgiving at the Acres and to bring along desserts; they also wished to attend Mass with us. Many of our ‘usuals’ were at Mass: Mary Agnes and Jan provided the music. Peg drove to Constantia at 9 AM to pick up John Ward and Aleita Rumsmoke, and they arrived back at the Acres in time for Mass. Loretta arrived in from Johnstown in order to spend the next ten days here at the Acres. Father Jones’ brother Bill and niece Amy drove up from Syracuse, as did Bob M’s sister and brother-in-law, Kathleen and Martin. Dawn came in from Orwell for Mass and to help in the kitchen.

Father Jones’ homily helped us to imagine the first Unity Acres Thanksgiving 40 years ago: Father McVey, Kate Stanton, and the community of men that was in its beginning stages of formation.

Shortly after Mass, dinner was served by a group of volunteers from the United Methodist Church in Mexico, as they have been doing at Thanksgiving and Christmas for several years; a dessert table was set up at the back of the Dining Hall and staffed by the family of fourteen, who had travelled from Red Creek, Fair Haven, Baldwinsville and Liverpool to serve the men. Former staff members, Ed and Bill, were also able to join us for the meal.

Helen brought floral centerpieces – mums, the tables were covered with brightly colored table coverings.

Between residents, visitors, volunteers and staff, close to 100 meals were served: Turkey, mashed potatoes and gravy, squash, candied sweet potatoes, carrots, green bean casserole, pickle, olives, stuffed celery, devilled eggs, soda bottles and water bottles, many, many desserts etc., etc. and of course, CRANBERRY SAUCE!

Prayer: Christmas/December 2009

“The Angel said to them: ‘Do not be afraid ... I proclaim to you good news of great joy which will be for ALL the people ... A Savior is born for you which is Christ and Lord.’” –Luke 2: 10-11

We at Unity Acres give thanks, O God, for Christmas: A Savior is born for us. We pray that all will hear and rejoice:

- All of our men,
- Our staff and volunteers,
- Our many friends and benefactors,
- Our fellow Catholic Worker communities,
- All helping persons and communities.

May our faith remove our fears, our hope grow stronger, our joy in turn proclaim the Good News (Gospel) to all.

In the coming year and beyond, we pray, gracious God, that this Good News of great joy reach the ears, minds and hearts of people everywhere. A Savior is born for all of us, that peace and justice flourish at last.

Thank You, Lord God, for the priceless (Christmas) gift of Your Son, our Savior who is Christ the Lord. Amen.

Father Robert Jones