



UNITY ACRES
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Epiphany
January 6, 2008

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

As this is our first newsletter for the new year, I thought it might be a nice occasion to briefly summarize the events and highlights of 2007. Throughout the past year, between 60 and 75 men were living at Unity Acres on any given day; each one provided with food, clothing and shelter. Those who are capable, assist in a great variety of tasks that allow the day-to-day functioning of Unity Acres to continue. Those who have an income share with the Acres to help defray expenses. Eucharist is celebrated on a regular basis in our Sacred Heart Chapel; an AA group meets twice weekly in the Dining Hall.

How quickly time passes, yet certain events do stand out. After an unusually warm and snow-less December 2006 and January 2007, the month of February 2007 put Oswego County in the national news for several days due to a snow emergency. During the course of a week to ten days, over 140 inches of snow fell in Orwell. Many of the towns in the surrounding area received similar snowfalls. There was a lot of cooperation on the part of several of the men in shoveling walkways and roofs, and operating snow-blowers, and plowing the driveway with the tractor. Our snowplow truck was not operational at the time, unfortunately, making our daily clean-up from the heavy snowfall much more difficult than it might have been otherwise.

The problem of a lack of a working plow truck was rectified in April when we purchased a heavy duty 4wd, flat bed pick-up. It came with a plow, and is suitable as well for hauling trash to the dump, and building materials from the hardware stores, which is good since the van that we had been using for those purposes went out of commission as well in early 2007, due to a blown engine.

Shortly after the snow had melted, several of the men began cutting, hauling, chopping and splitting firewood, all collected on our property. They were able to cut mostly downed logs, and standing dead timber. During the spring, a wood storage shed was built next to the wood boiler. In August we purchased a heavy-duty wood-splitter to assist in the effort of getting wood prepared and seasoned for the winter heating season. Firewood has been used as a source of fuel for the wood-boiler that was put into service for heating the Star Building – our kitchen, dining hall and recreation room – in December of 2006. The wood boiler also provides hot water for the Star Building,

and has helped us to reduce considerably our consumption of electricity and fuel oil.

As of this moment, we have approximately 15 face cords of wood put away, and expect that this amount should be enough to get us through the worst of the winter.

It was with some sadness that we finally decided last spring, after a number of setbacks, to end up our cattle project, at least for the time being. The bulk of the herd was sent to be slaughtered in May; the two remaining members of the herd, 'May' and her calf 'Nick' were shipped out on December 26. The barn formerly used for hay storage, incidentally, has been designated as an additional space for storing firewood.

Several of the men started planting the vegetable gardens in May, beginning with the more frost tolerant varieties of plants such as peas, and followed up by broccoli, cabbage, squash, tomatoes, peppers and so on. The corn, as we had hoped, was ready in time for the annual Family Picnic day in August. The fresh vegetables from the garden were a welcome addition to the daily menu as long as they lasted.

Many visitors, friends, family members and benefactors were in attendance for the Picnic on August 19. We estimated between 200 and 225 people joined us that day. It seems that every year, the picnic gets better and better. This past year was no exception.

In August, the reconstruction of the hog barn was completed, and we were able to obtain six piglets which we will raise until they are around six to seven months old. They are growing rapidly.

This past December marked another turning point for the men and the staff: Mark Baker has resigned his position at the Acres – a sad loss for us all. His position, in turn, has been filled by Mike Johnson. Mike has been at the Acres for several months, and knows the routines well, and has already been of great help in helping with room assignments, transportation to medical appointments, the very frequent trips to the hardware store and so on. He is also the person in charge during the weekends. So all

we can say is, welcome aboard, and thanks, Mike!

The Board of Directors and Members of Unity Acres have been busy and effective in assisting the men and the staff to identify and accomplish certain goals for the Acres during 2007, most notably, our main project of the year: repairing roofs – particularly that of our main



**The
Gifford
Foundation**

Roof repairs completed during 2007 were funded in part by a grant from the Gifford Foundation.

building, 'B' Building. A fund-raiser committee organized our 'Raise the Roof' party, helped with mailing our appeal to parishes and members of the clergy. This effort was also supported by a grant in the amount of \$10,000 received from the Gifford Foundation. Many thanks to Bob Belge for having written the grant proposal; and to Mary Maples, Pat Waelder, Carol Berrigan and Sister Monica Nortz for their work on our successful Fundraiser.

In addition to the repairs to the roof of 'B' Building, we were able as well to

complete other necessary repairs to the roofs of several other buildings: the Tractor Barn, the Breezeway (between the Brick Building and the Infirmary), and the Water Treatment Building.

The rear entrance to the Star Building was entirely rebuilt during the fall. Three new, energy-efficient windows were installed in the hallway of the Annex Building, replacing windows that had become quite deteriorated.

As the past year has drawn to its close, please remember our community members who died during 2007: Larry McCue, Larry Oakes, Steve Stratton, Jimmie Roberts, and David Hennessey, all of whom were buried in our Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery. Also Tom Scanlon and Howard Deal, two former residents who died in Syracuse, and have been buried there

Today is a quiet Sunday afternoon: warm for early January. Snow and ice – usually so prevalent this time of the year are slowly melting. Since today is Epiphany, the Christmas season is officially at an end. The holiday decorations in the main sitting room have been taken down, and soon, the manger scene – set up in the Chapel – will be taken down as well.

The weeks before Christmas were, as is the case most years, a flurry of activity at Unity Acres. The Altar and Rosary Society of Christ Our Light Parish (Pulaski/Lacona) hosted their annual Christmas Dinner on December 13, as they have done for many years, so many in fact that no one seems entirely certain for exactly how many years – perhaps 30 or more – this tradition has continued. We received many Christmas cards and greetings from friends and benefactors and these we posted in the sitting room for all to enjoy. We also received many, many Christmas presents for the men. Some were collected by individual donors who brought them out to us personally, others were collected as part of a parish-based effort. We are particularly grateful for such efforts made by parishioners at Saint Mary's in Skaneateles, Saint Mary's in Cortland, Saint Stephen's in Phoenix and Saint Leo's in Tully.

With the assistance of several of the men, Laura spent many hours sorting through the presents, assuring that items of clothing would fit the recipient, that gloves would be given to the men who do outdoor work during the winter months and so on. As is our custom, the presents were distributed on Christmas Eve, after supper, and in the Dining Hall. Once everyone had finished eating, Bill, Mike and Steve called up each of the men to receive the selection of gifts that had been prepared. (A smattering of applause, a small cheer, goes up for each of the men as his name is announced.)

After Mass on Christmas Day, the community again gathers in the Dining Hall. We are joined by members of the Mexico United Methodist Church, who have come to serve the meal. Father Jones leads the assembled people in prayer. The menu for the day was roast beef and roast pork, with a variety of vegetables and all the usual fixings. In addition, on Christmas Day, the Christmas stockings prepared by Sue Heinley were distributed.

As we know, Christmas should ordinarily be a time of happiness for all. Often this is not the case, for a variety of reasons. This year, our usually joyful celebration of the holiday was made sad due to the deaths of two of our community members. The

first of these was RONALD BARNES. Ron had been a member of the Unity Acres community for many years, having first arrived at the Acres in 1990. For several years, he had been responsible for painting the exteriors of the buildings at Unity Acres. I always knew that spring had truly set in when Ron would put in an order for 10 gallons of Pro-Am bright white exterior latex paint. For the last ten years or so, his health was no longer such that he could climb ladder while carrying buckets of paint. He spent many hours, though, biking around the surrounding countryside during the months and years he spent at the Acres. During the last several months, Ron had been in and out of nursing homes in Oswego and in Syracuse, and on December 21, 2007, he died at Rosewood in Syracuse. Father Jones arrived in time that morning to anoint Ron before his death. His Mass of the Resurrection was celebrated in our chapel on December 28 in the presence of his family and friends.

DAN SIDES died unexpectedly on the morning of Christmas Eve. Dan first arrived at the Acres in September 2003. After a short period of settling in, he took on the responsibility of operating our clothing room – sorting and sizing items of donated clothing, and storing away property of former residents – he continued in this capacity until his death. Dan was also notable in his love of cats, and had taken in several over the years, naming each one, and feeding them and caring for them. He looked after the

staff as well, setting up the coffee pots, and keeping the staff's meeting room in order on a daily basis for most of the last four years. Dan's sudden death was a shock to us all. His funeral was held in our Chapel on January 4, 2008. Both Ron and Dan will be buried in Saint Martin de Porres Cemetery during the spring.

May our friends, Ron and Dan, who have gone forth from this world, come to share eternal happiness with all the saints.

AMEN.

Steve Dickhout



Dan Sides, on roof of North Wing
May 17, 2004

PRAYER: January 2008
For Peace Everywhere

“The shepherds ... made know the message about this child ... All who heard it were amazed...and Mary kept all these things, reflecting on them in her heart.”

-- Luke 2: 16-19, Feast of Mary, January 1

O God, we thank You for the countless blessings of 2007. Forgive us for any ingratitude or refusal to walk in Your light. Our world, beautiful as

You created it, suffers from the ugliness of sin. Persons, families, groups and nations wage war. Pride, greed, bigotry, lust for power, reject the peace You offer and replace it with violent destruction.

In 2008 and Beyond

*To all in our Unity Acres Family:
“The Lord bless you and keep you!
The Lord let His face shine upon
you, and be gracious to you! The
Lord look upon you kindly, and give
you peace!” -- Numbers 6:23-26, Feast of Mary,
January 1*

In the face of all of this, we turn to You. Send Your Spirit on us, that we follow Mary’s way. May we, too, “keep all these things” -- the joy and wonder of God’s love in Jesus. Help us to reflect on them in our hearts. So may we be at peace -- with You, ourselves and all people. Thus make us instruments of your peace. Amen.

Father Robert Jones