



UNITY ACRES
P.O. BOX 153
ORWELL, NEW YORK 13426
TEL: 315 298-6215
FAX: 315 298-5356

March 26, 2007

Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

A week of warm weather, one day of heavy rain, followed by one foggy day, and then, finally, several bright sunny days, and the winter's snows have all but disappeared from the surrounding open fields and meadows. Some of the migratory birds have arrived during the past several days: red-winged blackbirds, robins, a flock of north-bound geese, a pair of ducks. Trout Brook has flooded the little meadow just down the road toward Richland as it does almost every year at the point where the brook crosses Route 2, and heads south to join up with the Salmon River.

So our thoughts are turning to spring, to the inevitable round of spring-cleaning, to the planting of gardens and patching up the winter's damages to our lawns and grounds. Tree limbs broken off from the large pine trees will be collected by the wagon load and hauled off into the woods. With the welcome improvement in the weather, we are able to contemplate, anticipate and plan for some improvements to the buildings and facilities here at the Acres.

Improvements to the buildings and the grounds are 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 as part of the old Oswego County TB Sanatorium. These buildings had lain vacant as well for some time before they were purchased by Father McVey for the foundation of Unity Acres in 1969.

As Unity Acres, we have occupied this site now for almost 40 years!

During these almost forty years, Father McVey, volunteers too numerous to count, and especially the men have put in untold hours making many, many improvements to the buildings and grounds. Their accomplishments are valuable for the resultant improvements to the men's comfort and safety. More important, however, is the sense of pride and community that is developed among the people involved in the planning and the carrying out of the many projects, large and small, year in and year out.

Apart from making improvements to the buildings and grounds, we are constantly trying to keep up with the normal wear and tear caused by the bad weather, wind, rain, and notably, the excessive snow that we sometimes get here in Northern Oswego County. Often we experience the constant need to make repairs as something of a trial: a roof is leaking and needs to be repaired and needs to be patched, or a pump is not working and

needs to be replaced, or a furnace isn't working correctly, someone will have to find out why. But still, what a blessing these small trials are, each little problem an opportunity for someone to offer to serve the greater good of the community in whatever way is necessary, contributing his talents and time, his willingness and his heart.

So we will try not to complain if there always seem to be walls to be rebuilt, roofs to be patched, windows to be replaced and so on. (Just now, someone has reported a leak from plumbing in the second floor bathroom in the A Building—the water is coming through the ceiling into the room below.)

Still, we are reaching a point where we have to wonder how many more years we can expect the buildings to remain structurally sound and safe and serviceable. We've managed during the last seven years to have new roofs installed on two of the buildings: the A Building in 2000 and the Annex during 2004. At this point it seems advisable to continue with re-roofing the remaining buildings as we are able to do so.

The rolled rubber roofing over the Second-floor east and west wings of the main building is in need of patching, and the rolled asphalt roofing over the third floor section of the building needs to be stripped and replaced. We have had complaints of leaks. Several attempts have been made (by ourselves) to patch the suspect areas of the rolled rubber roofing over the east and west wings, to no avail.

The Infirmary building has a shingled roof over its two storey south facing front, and over part of the one storey rear section, with metal roofing over the remainder. The metal roof is about 10 years old, and was built by John Donnelly and volunteers from Saint Francis Farm, using mostly salvaged materials. The shingled part of the roof is probably between 20 and 30 years old.

The roof over the breezeway between the Infirmary and the Brick Building is in bad shape and there are several places where it leaks. The breezeway roof abuts the north end of the Infirmary and causes leaks along the exterior (north) wall of the Infirmary and the interior of that building as well.

A group of friends of supporters of Unity Acres established a funding committee some time ago; this group recently met last Saturday in the basement of Saint Vincent's school in Syracuse to discuss some of Unity Acres' current needs such as the ones cited above. Mary Maples read from the first paragraphs of a letter from Father McVey written on the occasion of the Acres' 20th anniversary in 1989, and describing the big move from Syracuse to Orwell on March 3rd, 1969:

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.

Slavery, the streets, depression, alcohol, drugs and jail. How could there be a way out from this trap? In a reading from the Mass for the Third Sunday of Lent, taken from Exodus, God speaks to Moses: "I have witnessed the affliction of my people and heard their cry of complaint... Therefore I have come down to rescue them." And in a reading for the First

Sunday of Lent, from Deuteronomy: “When the Egyptians maltreated and oppressed us, imposing hard labor upon us, we cried to the Lord, the God of our fathers, and he heard our cry and saw our affliction, our toil and oppression. He brought us out of Egypt with his strong hand and outstretched arm.”

God’s people departed Egypt to obtain possession of the land that had been promised to Abraham -- a land flowing with milk and honey. During their forty year sojourn in the desert of Sinai, he provided them with bread in the form of manna. The small group of very trusting men who accompanied Father McVey on the Exodus from Syracuse to Orwell in March 1969 were seeking a way out from the trap of the streets; a place of refuge, a sanctuary. At the outset, there were no guarantees of any kind of success. Only faith and trust. They relied on God’s promise of mercy. They trusted, and they depended on God to meet their needs. And if we have arrived at a place of refuge and sanctuary, still we know that we are on pilgrimage; still in a state of utter dependence. Saint Augustine says: Our pilgrimage on earth cannot be exempt from trial. We progress by trial.

As the men of Unity Acres have built and rebuilt for nearly 40 years, forming and reforming to meet shifting needs and circumstances — and despite the daily grind of hard knocks, disappointments and failure — they have done so by love and by faithfulness. Sharing heavy burdens. Hearing one another. Helping one another.

As we work together to build up this earthly city, let our eyes be fixed on the city that lasts forever.
Wishing you Peace and the Joy of the Resurrection as we enter this Easter Season.

Steve Dickhout

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Please pray for the repose of the soul of Steven Stratton, who died on March 3, at his residence in Oswego. He was only 55 years old. Steve lived at the Acres between May 2002 and November 2004. Steve had a great love of animals, especially dogs, and was almost finished in a course to qualify as a certified dog trainer at the time of his death. From the occasional phone call, and from notes received in the mail, Steve kept in touch, and we know that he was happy and doing well and moving forward in his life, so the suddenness of his death has been a particular shock. Steve had a lot of friends here at the Acres, and will be missed by many of the men. Steve, Rest in Peace.

PRAYER

For Holy Week/Easter 2007

"Simeon said to Mary, 'This child will be a sign from God which many will speak against...'"

--Luke 2, 3-4 (Presentation of Jesus)

"As Jesus rode along... they proclaimed: 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord!'"

--Luke 19, 36 (Palm Sunday)

"Jesus knew that his hour had come to pass from this world... He loved His own... and He loved them to the end."

--John 13, 1 (Holy Thursday)

"And he said... 'Behold your King!'
They cried out: 'Crucify Him!'"

--John 19, 14-15 (Good Friday)

"They found the stone rolled away from the tomb; but when they entered, they did not find the Body of the Lord Jesus."

--Luke 24, 2 (Holy Saturday, Easter Vigil)

Jesus, Risen Lord and Savior, Glory to You! We come again to the celebration of Your Resurrection --

Your triumph over sin and death,
and our reason to hope.

From the very beginning, in God's Mysterious plan, You became one with us. When Mary and Joseph presented You in the Temple, Spirit-filled Simeon foretold that many would reject You. Indeed, years later, as You entered Jerusalem, they shouted "Hosanna!" But soon afterward, they shouted "Crucify Him!"

Loving us all "till the end", You became the sacrifice for our salvation. "It is finished." As the sorrowing women reached the tomb, they saw the stone rolled back, the tomb empty! You had risen.

Lord Jesus, forgive us and strengthen our fickle heart. Help us to connect all of our holy seasons as the unbreakable chain of Your love: Christmas, Lent, Holy Week, Easter, Pentecost. May we learn this anew this Easter Season. We pray: Increase our faith, strengthen our hope. Renew our love. Risen Lord, we thank You.

Alleluia!