



UNITY ACRES
P.O. BOX 153
ORWELL, NEW YORK 13426

TEL: 315 298-6215
FAX: 315 298-5356

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Dear Friends of Unity Acres,

Last Sunday's reading at Mass from the Old Testament book of Nehemiah (8, 2-10) recounts how Ezra, a scribe expert in the Law of Moses, brings the book of the Law before the people assembled in Jerusalem. The scroll is not an idol; but when Ezra shows it to them, the people prostrate themselves before it. Ezra blesses the Lord and the people listen attentively to Ezra as he reads and explains the Law, then they weep.

The people to whom Ezra solemnly proclaims the Law of Moses are a community of exiles returned to their city and country after decades of captivity following the utter destruction of Jerusalem and Judea, a catastrophe that had been tirelessly foretold by the prophets. But the prophets had also foretold that a faithful remnant would one day return. Nehemiah, Ezra and the people of Jerusalem are living precisely in that time of mercy. Some years earlier the Lord had put it into the mind of Cyrus, the king of the Persians, to 'build Him [God] a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah.' And furthermore that whoever among Cyrus' subjects that belonged to any part of God's people should return to build up the house of God (2 Chronicles 36, 23).

The returning exiles had confronted many difficulties and hardships as they struggled to bring about the restoration of their city. For the older generation of returning deportees, the reconstruction of God's Temple was as much an occasion to grieve the loss of the first Temple as it was to rejoice at the foundation of the second: 'Priests and Levites and the chiefs of the clans, the old men who had seen the first house, wept at the sight of the founding of this house' (Ezra 3, 12-13). Even after the Temple and city walls have been rebuilt, the people of Jerusalem continue to face trial, affliction, adversity: 'Today we are slaves, and the land that You gave our fathers to enjoy its fruit and bounty -- here we are slaves on it! On account of our sins it yields its abundant crops to kings whom you have set over us. They rule over our bodies and our beasts as they please, and we are in great distress.' (Nehemiah 9, 36f)

The people at first weep at hearing Ezra's proclamation of the Law. Still, the occasion of hearing the Law is proclaimed a festival day: It is a graced moment. Therefore Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites instruct the people to rejoice: 'Go, eat rich foods and drink sweet drinks, and allot portions to those who had nothing prepared; for today is holy to the Lord. Do not be saddened this day, for rejoicing in the Lord must be your strength' (Nehemiah 8, 10). The leaders then lead the people in celebrating for the first time since the days of Joshua -- the feast of tabernacles (Nehemiah 8, 13-18). The people of Jerusalem acknowledge by this celebration that they are receiving blessings, and strength, and encouragement, in the midst of their trials, through the word of God.

And so too, with us: blessings amidst trials, as we encourage one another to keep our hearts joyful amidst everyday challenges and disappointments; and mindful of, and grateful for, the many blessing and mercies each day brings.

And so we are mindful of, and grateful for, the material and spiritual support that sustains this place, and has done so for almost 35 years now, even as we cope with the on-going problems of continuously building-up our little community here at Unity Acres, by love and by faithfulness.

Someone is sick, someone is unhappy, there is no water for laundry. Still, by love and by faithfulness, problems are met and resolved. And so someone is willing to care for the man who has become sick, another is willing to listen attentively to the one who is unhappy, still another will go to work on the plumbing.

And so it goes.

Wishing you peace, joy, and happiness during this year of grace, 2004.

Steve Dickhout

Some weeks ago, one of our residents, Robert Koos, better known to all as 'Bear', with the kind offer to write a few lines for inclusion in an upcoming newsletter. Robert first arrived at the Acres from Oswego during the summer of 2002, and returned here again during the summer of 2003 after an absence of several months.

The paragraphs which follow are Robert's impressions and experience of Unity Acres.

What a Blessing, by Robert Koos

I have been at Unity Acres for about eight months now and over all it has been a blessing. At first I looked at it as a measure of my defeat. 42 years old, a person for most of his adult life who has paid his own way and taken care of himself. But now I must rely on others, swallow my pride and trust that all will be well. That is where my faith and trust in God plays a huge part. I know God's word and among all the other promises he has kept, he also has provided my needs. And from time to time my wants, Unity Acres is my home, and I am blessed to have a home that is founded in love and concern for the good of man.

I did not know Father McVey but his ideals and his goodness, and his love for God and to do God's will is still a part of what Unity Acres is today. I am thankful that the world still has people who care. I have found over time when I stop fighting God and submit to His plan that things go a lot easier. God in His goodness has a plan for everyone who is willing. God and I have become closer than ever before, to the point where I pray that God will lead me into a full time ministry and that I will go to seminary and become a Methodist pastor. Many other blessings have found me since I have been here. The greatest is that after being saved for 30 years or more, I have had a head on collision with grace, a personal encounter.

It has be an eye opener, 'til you come to that point in your walk with God you can never truly understand God's full goodness. It has been a revelation of truth and has made things clear. A blessing that I am sure I would have never received if I was not where I am. I would have been distracted by everything else, I would not have had the clearness of mind. But God is good. He has put me

somewhere where He can mold me into the man He wants me to be.

Other good things have happened here. My first book is done, I am again a member of a church body, Orwell United Methodist. I have found new and good friends, and others. The staff here are also a blessing, Laura, Mark, Bill, Aly, Steve, Peggy, Father Jones, and all the others who have been called by God into this ministry, but not only called, but also blessed with the gift of caring. Good people and I am blessed to know them and call them my brothers and sisters in Christ. I don't look at Unity Acres as a homeless shelter, for it is my home, I see it as a place to grow, not only in spirit but also in the mind. A new beginning, a fresh start, to find out who you are and where you want to go.

I am blessed, and all who have come through these doors and all who will be blessed as well even if they refuse to accept it. They are changed in one way or another and no matter where they go, their life will not be the same. They have been touched by the love and goodness of God, even if they deny it, which I am certain they will. But God has made a mark on their heart, and showed them that he cares and that they are not alone and need not face life afraid. A blessing that now I myself can grow and become a true servant of God. God is teaching me things daily, tolerance is the big one now, not an easy thing to learn, but God is good and I will get there.

I am sure that I will not be at the Acres forever, that God in His plan will move me out in His good time. But when I go I will take with me all the blessings that I have received here, the love and concern that has been shown me, the understanding and love that has freely been given to me, that now I need to pass on to others a step to aide me in my ministry. I can never completely thank God or those who work at the Acres. But my testimony of the good there I can share with others in my goodness toward them.

I have been blessed greater than I ever thought I could be, I am thankful that Unity Acres is here and God continues to provide our needs, that God keeps us safe in the hollow of His hand. I leave you with this, God is good, His love and blessing are for all and forever. God is love to be given freely and shared by all, God is hope, for in Him is a new way for your life if you chose to walk in His light. In God there is no fear, only peace, no want, but abundance. God is a good Father wanting the best for his children.

I ask that you continue to pray for Unity Acres, that God will continue His ministry in Orwell, that His peace and love will be constant. Pray for the staff out here that God will give them the wisdom and strength to do His will. We thank you for your prayers and gifts, and pray that God will continue to bless and keep you all of your days.

Amen.

Prayer for January 2004

(This first month of 2004 has been severe, bitterly cold, bringing much hardship. Our prayer is especially for all victims of tragedies, natural or human made. It is also for all rescue, emergency, repair, delivery and service people. To help others they 'quote endure all things,' [1 Cor 13,7] And this is love.)

Help us to love you with all our hearts and to love all people as you love them.

—opening prayer of 4th Sunday in ordinary time

Help us dear God to learn what love is and to live it.

"Love is patient, love is kind"

As individuals and community, help us to be patient and kind.

"Love is not jealous, pompous, rude."

Help us God to count our blessings: to be humble, to be courteous, at home, work, on the highway, in the stores.

"Love does not seek its own interests."

Enable us Dear God, to 'go the extra mile' in time, effort, care, for those in need.

"Love does not brood over injury."

Help us we pray to forgive, even as we are forgiven. Heal our inner wrath, lest it consume us.

"Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

Gift us O God with courage and strength, faith and hope, and perseverance. May your Spirit teach us that in all seasons, of nature and of our lives, that
"LOVE NEVER FAILS." Amen.