

The Hope Center

History of sorts . . .

During World War I, Sarah and Amos Holden turned their property at 73 Grand Street, Newburgh, over to the local chapter of the *American Red Cross* providing needed services to the area and offering a place where volunteers made hospital gowns and supplied yarn to area women making clothes for servicemen. The home was also headquarters for the *Canteen Girls* who gave donuts and coffee to soldiers passing through town on their way to ships that would take them to Europe.

The war ended and needs changed. Mrs. Holden and others soon saw a need for a place where elderly women could have a decent and safe home. When Mrs. Holden died in 1922, she left the entire property and an endowment to establish a home for older women. A year later, the first residents moved into what, in 1980, became known as the Amos and Sarah Holden Home.

Through the Great Depression, another world war, and the tremendous changes that have taken place in the world, in the country, the City of Newburgh, and the ways in which services are provided to older adults, Holden Home's leadership adapted, sometimes at great personal cost as they worked to keep the facility running. But one thing never changed – a commitment to serving the people who walked through the doors, treating them with great dignity and respect.

It was that need to be able to continue treating residents with dignity and respect that, late in 2008, they were moved to the Johnes Home, a sister facility, on Balmville Road in the Town of Newburgh. Since then, the Holden property has waited for another group to come along and transform the Holden's dream into one that meets the needs of the people of Newburgh's East End.

That group is **Ecclesia Ministries of Newburgh, Inc.** which was founded in 2006 “in order to serve the spiritual and other needs of homeless, marginalized and privileged people in a long-term ministry of mutual learning, reconciliation and healing . . .” Since its founding, the ministry has conducted weekly worship services on the street, opened a drop-in center which is open daily from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m., and in October 2011, opened **Ecclesia House**, a fully renovated, 10-bed transitional housing facility serving women as they journey to new lives.

Through its work among the people of Newburgh's East End, Ecclesia members have come to understand the needs and challenges of their friends and neighbors in Newburgh's East End. Since the fall of 2010, Ecclesia's leadership team has dreamed of ways in which the ministry might take an active role in bringing peace to the streets and hope and empowerment to our neighbors. The dream takes shape as the **Hope Center** which would rebirth the Amos and Sarah Holden Home as . . . well . . . a center for hope.

Project Description/Concept Plan

The **Hope Center** would include people within and outside the walls of the property. Those outside could be located elsewhere throughout the neighborhood or living at some distance. But, no matter where they are, Center members would be bound together by a common Rule of Life that includes a commitment to daily prayer and scripture study and other spiritual disciplines appropriate to their faith journeys. In addition, each member of the Center would be committed to building God's Dream through service among and to the poor and marginalized in a manner consistent with the teaching of scripture, one that promotes non-violence, human rights, and economic, social, and environmental justice in the City of Newburgh.

In practice, that vision would look something like this:

I. Residential community. This is the foundation upon which all activities/programs would be based. It would be comprised of a core group of Abbey members; other, permanent residents; residents in transition; intern, and pilgrims all participating in the life of the community and its health and well-being.

- a. **The Core Group** (eight to ten people) is a community of contemplative activists. That is to say it is a community of faithful people who pray together and support and encourage one another in the living out of their faith, loving mercy and doing justice among the City of Newburgh's oppressed and marginalized people.*

The group would include:

1. Sisters Religious – Three to four sisters serving the neighborhood's women and children in ways that are consistent with the order's core values.
2. Brother or Associate in residence – One member of a monastic community rotating in and out, conducting retreats, offering spiritual direction and engaging in the community's peace and justice initiatives.
3. Ruth and Steve – Help organize, coordinate and participate in running programs sponsored by the community including spiritual direction, leading retreats, engaging in the community's peace and justice initiatives on and off site.
4. "Others" – As many as three persons of faith who are committed to a life of learning to live the gospel.

This group would be the permanent, driving force behind the community. Each would contribute financially to the support of the community according to her/his means (probably 40 to 45% of gross monthly income (*it is assumed that the persons religious would make no financial contribution save for donations made to them for such purposes*)) in addition to work on site (eg: cooking, cleaning, laundry, shopping, and so on).

b. **Other members of the community would include**

1. **Long-term residents**

- a. **“Friends” of the community** (zero to three, depending on the number of “others” as described above) – “Friends” who live on site, have “regular,” secular jobs and may or may not participate in the work and/or programs of the community. In addition to contributing to the community’s financial needs, they would also participate in routine chores (cooking, cleaning, etc.). The financial contribution of each friend would be similar to that of core group members.

2. **Transitional Residents**

- a. **“Guests”** (three to five) – Persons receiving public assistance who have been “placed” by social services following interviews/screening. They can be persons who have spent time in an existing transitional facility after having been released from incarceration, a drug program, or a decision to leave the streets. This would also include respite care for one or more persons released from the hospital with no place to go. These persons would participate in (mostly) off-site programs and share meals and routine chores with other members of the community.

3. **Short-term Residents**

- a. **Interns** (one to two) – Seminarians and/or college students who join the community for one to two semesters to work in programs/activities that serve the surrounding community. Those programs could be those sponsored by Hope Center or other faith communities or secular community service agencies. They would contribute \$100 to \$150/month in room and board expenses according to their ability.
- b. **Pilgrims** (two to three) – Persons visiting the community for a weekend, a week or weeks at a time for a directed program of contemplation and service among those living in poverty. They would contribute \$30/night according to their ability for room and board (books, materials and such would be extra).
- c. **Family members/relatives** – visiting family members who have come for a weekend or for a few days

II. The Hope Center. This articulation of the Abbey’s mission would be physically located in the brick building (aka 85 Grand Street). The Center would be the vehicle through which Hope Center would promote non-violence, human rights, and economic,

social, and environmental justice in the City of Newburgh and its surroundings. In furtherance of that goal, The Hope Center would:

- a. Provide opportunities for others to grow spiritually by offering spiritual direction, workshops and retreats at minimal or no cost and help them to discover their own calling to the cause of peace and justice;
- b. Work with and help facilitate the efforts of all organizations whose goal it is to empower community residents in making positive changes in their own lives and the lives of their neighbors;
- c. Reach out to the general public as a sponsor of events that help participants discover that there is no “other,” that regardless of our gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, age, education, socio-economic status, or any other “thing” . . . we are beloved children of our Creator and that the “success” of the whole is dependent upon the “success” of the one;
- d. Advocate for those who have been wounded by domination and inequality;
- e. Create bridges between people by exchanging ideas and educating and empowering others;
- f. Promote a culture of peace by sponsoring nonviolence training; anger management programs, and conflict resolution/mediation services;
- g. Provide “incubator” space for start-up not-for-profits which have among their goals the empowerment of Newburgh’s citizens;
- h. Provide space where health educators, legal advocates, and other, similar, service providers can meet with clients at no cost;
- i. Serve as a catalyst for action and source of support for individuals and groups responding to community needs;
- j. Host regular “brunches” and/or “mixers” to foster networking among local groups working for peace and justice, locally, regionally, and nationally and internationally.

III. SafeHaven Drop-in Center. Currently located at 98 Grand Street and open from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. every day, this facility opened for the first time on November 1, 2007. For more than four years, it has been true to its original vision, that of providing

“A warm, welcoming, friendly, safe, after hours drop-in center where homeless and otherwise marginalized persons can get a cup of coffee and a snack, relax, read, catch a nap, watch a movie, listen to music, take a shower, and/or talk with a counselor who will help them check out job or housing opportunities, find shelter for the night, complete paperwork related to SSI, social services or other public and/or private agencies, connect with a detox or rehab center or health care agency, or simply talk about life’s joys and struggles. Space would also be provided where guests could meet with health care and other professionals who volunteer their time in service.”

Currently, an average of 35 persons in need visit the center each day.

This operation would be moved to the lower level of the “carriage house” which is larger than the current facility at 98 Grand Street, has two handicapped-accessible bathrooms,

a kitchenette, can be separated into activity areas, and has access to what could be developed into an outdoor seating area.

IV. Martin's Café (working name, named after The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a champion of peace and hope). This café would be a revenue-generating arm of the Center offering a limited menu of snacks and light meals featuring local organic produce prepared and served by residents and “friends” of the Abbey living within the neighborhood. There would be both an indoor and an outdoor seating area. The dining room on the lower level of the frame building (73 Grand Street) would serve as the indoor seating area; the outdoor area would be located in a “pocket park” at the rear of the frame building.

V. Gift Shop. This shop (location uncertain – perhaps the front parlor in the northeast corner of the frame building) would offer books, fair trade goods as well as crafts/art made by the people of the neighborhood and Center community.

VI. The Park in Front (to be named after a donor?). This space is located along Grand Street bounded on the north and south by the two main buildings and on the west by the “tunnel” structure. This park would serve as the (new) main entrance to facility (doors would be installed in the “tunnel”. It would feature a large central “patio” with a labyrinth design, gardens and seating area all designed to create a welcoming atmosphere and enhance the main entrance to Orange County Community College's Kaplan Hall which is located directly across the street. On Sunday afternoons, this would be the site of Ecclesia's outdoor worship service which is now in its sixth year. The park would also be the site of small outdoor concerts and open mic events.

VII. Ecclesia Industries. Offices and operational space for this “arm” of Ecclesia would be housed on the second floor of the Carriage House above the drop-in center. The purpose of EI would be to start micro businesses employing one or two or three persons from the neighborhood in meaningful work that offers a living wage and (when possible) directly serves the community.

Tops on the list is the *Computers for Kids* project wherein Ecclesia would accept tax-deductible donations of computers from persons, organizations which are upgrading, refurbish them and distribute them to needy school children in the neighborhood and beyond. In concert with this project Ecclesia Industries would work to Wi-Fi the neighborhood beginning with the Center property and enlisting the aid of neighborhood churches to provide seamless, free Wi-Fi internet access to any family with a library card.

Phased Occupancy/Development

Full occupancy and use would happen over a three year period and would be a function of available funds and any required municipal approvals. The probable scenario is this:

Phase 1: Occupancy by long-term and transitional residents and the SafeHaven Drop-in Center on or about July 1, 2012. The most obvious reason for this is cash flow. The facility is in a condition suitable for occupancy with a general thorough cleaning and minor repairs required before residents could move into the facility. The singular exception/issue is the kitchen which needs to be completely fitted out (although there are two stoves in place which may be operational). **Phase 2:** Over the two-and-a-half years following occupancy, the other aspects of the Center's operations would be developed. By early in 2013, the Hope Center would be open for business, Ecclesia Industries would have completed a business plan for the *Computers for Kids* project and begin to set up shop, and the first "pilgrims" and one intern would take up residency.

Phase 3: In the Spring of 2014, the café and gift shop will be fully operational and folks will be invited to gather for the dedication of the park.