SAINT FRANCIS HOUSE

25th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

and NEW WINESKINS' UPDATE

June 5, 2024

Dear Friends: This letter comes to invite you to our 25th Anniversary Celebration on Saturday, June 22 from noon to 4 pm in Williams Memorial Park next to St. Francis House. We hope as many of you as possible can come in person! In our Christmas mailing, we promised you news of possible new wineskins. Here is what has been developing:

We have been working on the transition plan for St. Francis House for 2 years and in earnest for a year. In some ways we have been in transition since Emmett died on October 9, 2010. The recent process has been arduous and at times very difficult for all of us. It has also been joyful. We now feel that what both residents and board have been able to discern is the best outcome for us and for the future of our commitments to this community. I am especially grateful to the current members of the board. The last year has asked of them serious and time consuming work on behalf of the House and our residents. This year has been a far cry from our early days when as founding board member the late Rev. Canon Ed Rodman once remarked, the board's main function was to listen to the stories and admire the work! We are very grateful to our consultant, Alicia McAvay, who has shepherded us on the last six months of this journey.

So we need to share the news that we are ending the St. Francis House residential program as of this June 30. The SFH board has also voted to transfer the property to the SE Connecticut Community Land Trust. Within a year they expect to be able to transfer the ownership of the renovated buildings to Hearing Youth Voices who will be working with the Community Land Trust and FRESH New London to develop a new residential base. We are grateful to the leadership and staff of the groups we invited to be part of our discernment including all of the above organizations and the Homeless Hospitality Center. All of these organizations were supported in their early days by St. Francis House. If the walls of the Victory House Conference Room could speak of all the gatherings that have occurred there, it would be a remarkable testimony!

Hearing Youth Voices' 12 years of advocacy work in education is focused on developing Black and Brown student leadership. They will be developing a residential program for young adults working in partnership with the SE CT Community Land Trust whose office is located in one of the two St. Francis House buildings and with the urban farm/community gardening program participants of FRESH New London whose office and urban farm site is adjacent to St. Francis House.

Hearing Youth Voices plans to oversee the continued use of the St. Francis House library as a resource for new members. Former SFH board member Janice Syedullah, TSSF, began cataloguing the various collections with the help of Janet Minella-Didier. That work was continued by Verleah Kosloske, TSSF, and is now worked on weekly by our neighbor librarian Alex Clancy. The library includes a wide variety of holdings on racial and economic justice, theology, biography and poetry as well as the Linda C. Powell

womanist/feminist collection which includes Dr. Powell's work on urban school reform. Dr. Powell was a founding board member of St. Francis House and her work with CUNY Professor Michelle Fine was a key link in leading Hearing Youth Voices to develop its practice of PAR (Participatory Action Research). Hearing Youth Voices also plans to provide chapel or meditation space to their residents.

St. Francis House began as an intentional Christian community in 1999 anchored by Emmett and me and our children. Over the last 25 years, over 50 individuals and families have been members of the residential community. St. Francis House also has had a 25-year tradition of evening gatherings in the Catholic Worker tradition for Clarification of Thought. This face-to-face regional community came together for Evening Prayer and Bible study, a simple supper and the presentation and discussion of a topic of community concern. Excellent soup makers were recruited and cultivated for these events starting with Emmett and continued by House residents Vietnam veteran Mike Hatt and most recently Sharmaine Gregor. These in-person bi-weekly gatherings have been foundational to developing the extended St. Francis House community. We continued these spring and fall sessions even during COVID and have continued doing it on zoom. Zoom permits a wider community to participate e.g. friends and former board members from, for example, the Washington, DC area and St. Louis. But as longtime participant Jodi Johnson has pointed out, the core group was formed by our face-to-face gatherings and this is why she continues to come so faithfully even on zoom.

The last Clarification of Thought session for this spring focused on Education. Maya Sheppard, Executive Director of Hearing Youth Voices, joined SFH board member and retired elementary school teacher Deacon Ellen Adams. They led an in-depth discussion of the problems facing young people in our community. We got to hear about what Hearing Youth Voices has done to influence school budget decisions to ensure continued mental health resources for middle and high school students.

Our 25th Anniversary Celebration will be held in the park next to Victory House on Saturday, June 22 from noon to 4 p.m. (rain date Sunday). There will be food, birthday cake, music, poetry and reflections on the Life and Work of the House. We are inviting all of the organizations named above and many others with whom we have worked to come set up resource tables and share news of their current work and have fellowship time as well. This will be our first public gathering in the park since COVID. The official invitation is enclosed in this mailing with Deacon Ellen's invitation printed on the back. Any of you who would like to be included in the 25th Anniversary Legacy Booklet can send her material ASAP.

We look forward to seeing many of you on June 22. Our thanks to all of you for being part of the life of the House. For all that has been, thanks, and for what's to come, yes!

Peace and all good,

Anne Scheibner

St. Francis House Board President

KINDLY JOIN US FOR THE

25th Anniversary HONORING

St. Francis House

12 noon-4 pm

June 22, 2024

Williams Memorial

Park- Corner of

Broad & Hempstead

Rain Date: June 23

12-1 pm Music/Lunch 1-2 pm Poetry Jam 2-3 pm Prayer &Reflection 3-4 pm Cake/Music

Thank You all for the web of relationships that has brought us here today and earry us into the future.

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