

AIDS ministry acquires site

CHARLOTTE—The Cathedral at Charlotte, Inc., a non profit organization involved in developing an abandoned uptown motel into a comprehensive resource center for those touched by HIV/AIDS, took a significant step forward when it purchased the former Consort Inn property located at 900 N. Tryon Street. Romel Motor Inns Associates, Inc. Liquidating Trust had acquired the property by foreclosure in late 1991 after it had been seized by the United States Marshal in connection with the prosecution of the former motel managers on drug trafficking and money laundering charges. The deed stamps indicate a purchase price of \$500,000 for the 2.33 acre tract and 75,000 square foot facility.

Attorney Jerry Alan Reese, founded the Cathedral at Charlotte "because of the pathetic and callous response of the institutional Christian church to the AIDS epidemic and the need for a center where the resources of those involved in HIV/AIDS support activities could be better focused to meet the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of those touched by the disease." The corporation strives to provide an organization whereby persons from diverse backgrounds and lifestyles can work side by side in the alleviation of the suffering, ignorance and fear associated with AIDS.

The Consort Inn property was leased in November of 1992 and Reese moved into two rooms of the facility in April 1993. Reese was joined several months later by caretaker Noel McAdams, disabled master carpenter living with HIV who has supervised the security of the property and interior cleaning and demolition. A building permit application is pending to permit the upfitting of several rooms into caretaker living units and temporary offices for meetings and volunteer activities.

Already, over 200 individuals, businesses and groups have contributed time, materials and funds for the project.

A preliminary site plan and architectural drawings for the project are being donated by the local firm of Wilkerson Associates. When completed, the complex will offer a full range of facilities and services designed specifically for those living with AIDS, those providing care for loved ones, and those mourning a loss. Included among the facilities and planned programs are meal services; a fully staffed medical clinic; meeting rooms for group gatherings and religious services; financial and social services counseling; physical therapy; an upscale shop selling donated furniture, clothing and china; a baked goods shop; branch bank; pharmacy; offices for local AIDS support organizations; and from 30-40 apartments overlooking an enclosed atrium with plants and fountains offering a garden setting for rest and reflection. The entire complex will be designed around a colonial village theme with the atrium area designated as the "Commons."

To raise the necessary capital to complete renovations and fund the planned programs, Reese recently incorporated a charitable foundation known as The Foundation for The Refuge, Inc. Funds will be solicited from area religious congregations, charitable foundations and individual "friends." Reese points out that a small congregation or large Sunday school class will be asked to "adopt" an apartment while a larger congregation or civic club might finance the meeting hall, atrium garden or dining room. "The resources required to complete this project are pale in comparison to the wealth of this community. This project is a test of spirit, not of resources," says

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New Life MCC sells controversial property

by David Stout
Q-Notes Staff

MATTHEWS, NC—Members of New Life Metropolitan Community Church (New Life MCC) have voted to sell the building that made them the target of a neighborhood's anti-gay crusade over a year and a half ago.

At a special congregational meeting, held Sunday, November 27, it was decided that the church's best interest would be served by selling its facility, near Margaret Wallace Road, to the adjoining property owner for \$75,000.

The neighbor, who is not the same owner as when the congregation obtained its building, was offering substantially more than market value to acquire the land. According to the church's pastor, Rev. Bob Darst, the man bought the original neighbor's house for his son and daughter-in-law and wanted New Life's lot to build a home next to his children.

Darst said that the Board of Director's decision to support the sale was a difficult one to make. Some were concerned that selling would be akin to "giving in" to the campaign of hate or that Charlotte's gay community would misconstrue the move as a retreat. "We didn't know how people would take it; we didn't want to be seen as having sold out to the bigots."

Circumstances seem to bear out the church's belief that relinquishing the property was in its best interest, though.

Once New Life members had navigated the zoning problems initially levelled against the church, they faced another, even larger, roadblock to using their worship space. Neighborhood citizens were able to pressure the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Building Standards Department to launch a full-scale inspection of the church. Those inspections, and result-

ant violations, found the building to be in need of approximately \$20,000 in repairs, although some of the violations seemed questionable. "[Among other things] we were told that we would have to raise the roof, place steel bars in the concrete block walls every 3 or 4 feet and put a concrete barrier on top of the building, before putting the roof back on," Darst recounted.

The congregation did not have the money to bring the building up to code so they continued to hold worship services at the Unitarian Church, where they had been for a half-dozen years prior to the purchase.

Because of the upheaval and hatred the church had been subjected to, attendance was in the midst of a decline when the purchase offer came in. Spirits were raised considerably when the initial bid was revealed to be \$72,000, because the building had been bought for only \$55,000.

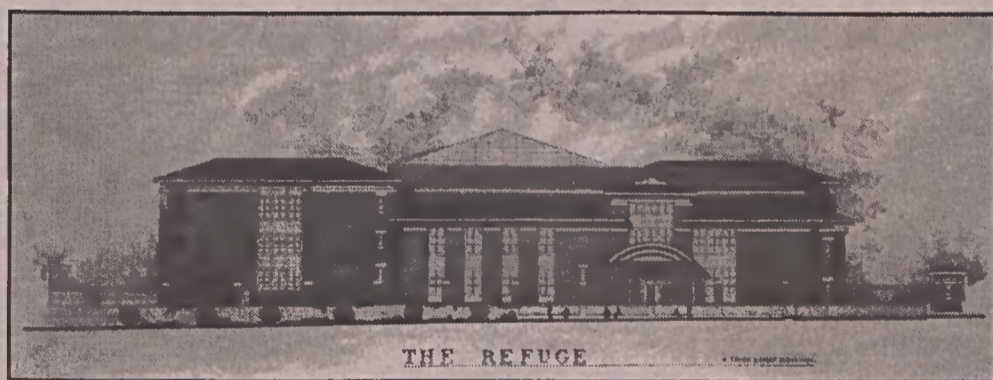
At the special congregational meeting, members voted to ask for \$74,000. A Board representative then re-negotiated with the proposed purchaser and was eventually able to wrangle an even better price of \$75,000.

When all the costs for acquiring the property were tabulated, including closing costs, insurance, mortgage payments, installing a septic tank and an air conditioner, New Life had invested approximately \$67,000 in its space. After the purchase, they were left with a balance of about \$8,000.

New Life's Building Fund now stands at almost \$44,000 and Rev. Darst says that the church will continue looking for a home of its own. "Our Building Search Committee is strictly made up of lay people now — they have already found two possibilities. One is in Midwood-Plaza and the other is on Wilkinson Boulevard. I don't want to say too much right now; I'm afraid of spooking the deals."



Rev. Bob Darst



Architectural rendering of The Refuge

Duke University plans free HIV legal clinic

by David Jones
Q-Notes Staff

DURHAM—Duke University is putting the final touches on a year-round legal services office for people with HIV. Carolyn McAllaster, a member of the Duke Law School faculty, has championed the new project and obtained support for it from the school's faculty and administration.

To be called The AIDS Legal Assistance Project, the program will be housed at the Duke Law School in the fall of 1995. Clients will be represented by Duke law students working under the supervision of law school faculty members. Students will receive academic credit for their work. From eight to twelve students will be able to participate each year, working 100 hours per semester.

Legal work will be free to indigent HIV-positive persons, and will cover document preparation of wills, living wills, health care powers of attorney; planning for the needs of dependent children; government benefits in-

cluding Medicaid, Medicare, Social Security disability and food stamps; employment and housing discrimination, and other legal issues that arise.

The project is an expansion of an existing program, the AIDS Wills Project begun in January 1994 with student and faculty volunteers. Some 35 law student volunteers have been active in that project under the supervision of McAllaster, whose brother died of complications of HIV two years ago. Clients of the Wills Project have come primarily from the Duke Medical Center's HIV clinics and local AIDS service organizations. No academic credit has been given for work by students in the Wills Project. The Legal Assistance Project will perform free legal work for eligible clients receiving medical care at Duke and other clinics and hospitals.

McAllaster told Q-Notes that "This is something that we need to do and we are just going to get it done," in spite of the fact that she and

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School children award Clinton a c-minus on AIDS

WASHINGTON, DC—The nation's school children have issued a midterm report card to President Clinton on their top five goals — one of which was AIDS — and on that issue, he received a mediocre C-.

About 23,000 students in the 4th through 6th grades cast their votes in a survey conducted by *Parade* magazine, a Sunday publication inserted in many newspapers across the nation, and the *Weekly Reader*, a national student newspaper. Clinton was rated on five issues determined by students: 1) protecting the environment, 2) finding a cure for AIDS, 3) helping the homeless, 4) reducing taxes and 5) stopping illegal drugs.

An article in the January 15 *Parade* reported a desperate plea from Melissa Wheeler, a fifth grader at Diamond Elementary School in Fort Stewart, GA, regarding the president's response to AIDS. "There needs to be more awareness on AIDS — or there might not be a future for my generation," wrote Wheeler to Clinton.

Parade also stated "AIDS is now the children's number 2 issue, marking a consistent rise in their concerns about the disease."

One of the children's illustrations accompanying the story shows the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt wrapped around the globe and a somber tag line beneath the drawing: "Let's find a cure before the world disappears under it."

The concern about AIDS expressed by the students pleased Donnie Luebring, a spokesperson for Americans for Gay Rights, a political advocacy group. "I applaud the recognition of, and concern for the AIDS epidemic. Their disturbing insight, and desire for action from the presidency, speaks volumes of wisdom, which we can only hope does not go unheard."

Luebring predicted that gay and lesbian voters would remember Clinton's broken AIDS promises when they hit the polls in '96. "While we are disappointed with Clinton's inability to effectively handle gays in the military, we are far more discouraged by our president's failing leadership with regard to the growing AIDS epidemic. We are angry with his 'AIDS can wait' approach. At this ... point, there are few reasons for gay voters to help Clinton win a second term."