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# CHRIST HOUSE

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A Newsletter for friends and family

Spring 2003

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## We Need Your Help!

Our financial situation is not good. After 9/11 all charitable organizations suffered a drop in revenue, and that is part of the picture. We were not able to send out newsletters regularly and stay in better touch with our supporters. That is being attended to. A two year grant to develop fund raising and do needed repairs on the building has not come through. As you all know, the costs of operating a home have gone up, particularly the insurance which we must carry because of our mortgage.

We want to continue helping the victims of torture and asylum seekers who need us, particularly the poorest of the poor, those are were described in this newsletter. All we can do is to appeal to all of you to help out as much as you can. We ask you to share this newsletter with friends too, because many folks are more inclined to give to small, independent ministries where there are no salaries paid and very little costs of fund raising. Your charity goes to the clients whom we serve.

*Thank you!*

## Easter is a Time for Changes

Bro. Hanney came to Christ House back in 1985 and has served as Director since Bro. Tom left in 1999. In his first years here he was the director of communications for the Archdiocese, and since 1994, he has been director of information systems at Ozanam Hall in Queens, a 432 bed nursing home. It is a huge responsibility. A recent report describes his work to-date as "designing and implementing very advanced computer systems, starting with 5 or six free standing computers and developing it into a network of approximately 85 desktops using very advanced network technologies. Several stages still remain to be implemented, including creating a network within the resident rooms to enable the latest medical technologies to be implemented there. Until recently, he was also responsible for teaching staff members the fundamentals of computing necessary for them to utilize the new network. A new and very advanced telephone system was designed and implemented and is now ready for an updating."

Obviously the position in Ozanam Hall is a important an onerous one. It is going to be even more of a task in the near future because the facility is embarking on a three year multi-million dollar renovation program.

At Christ House, he completely

computerized our accounting systems along with most of our record keeping, utilizing a network he designed and installed. After Bro. Tom moved to Florida, Brother found it harder and harder to balance the needs of Ozanam Hall and Christ House. Brother has decided now to step back from the overall director's position at Christ House, but plans

to keep doing some of the financial reports accounting, grant writing and records keeping, as well as helping out with the maintenance as needs arise and time permits.

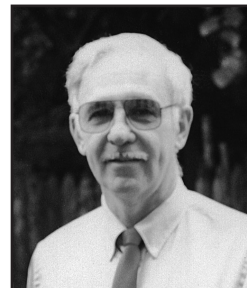
He will be our director of programs.

The board of directors certainly wishes him well and thanks him profusely

for all the time and energy he has expended at Christ House. The board has appointed "David" Raul Morales as director of residents, in charge of the day to day running of the house, and Vijay Wijesundera as his assistant. Both are presently on the staff.

A little background on these two men:

David has been a part of Christ House for 12 years as a staffer/volunteer. For many years he has been in charge of our food pantry which distributes food to our needy neighbors once a week. It is by design not a large operation, but it is effective; we know the clients who come to us. When Bro. Tom left in 1999 David took over the food



*Brother Hanney*

service from him and he has been general house manager for the last two years.

David is of Native American and Mexican stock and has a strong artistic, creative bend. After trying the seminary for a few years as a young man, he went to France and attended classes there on painting and like many young students, he traveled around Europe on shoe string whenever he could.

Back in the States, he owned and operated "Mexican Folk Art" in the East Village, where he sold his paintings and eclectic items: vintage clothing, hammocks, handicrafts and a very unusual collection of masks from Africa. He closed the store a few years ago when the competition from "web shopping" and the opening up of a large Kmart made it unprofitable for

him and many other small businesses to continue.

He has studied film making at NYU and photography at the New School; a member of Screen Actors Guild, he presently takes drama at the HB Studio and occasional gets acting work in TV series, commercials, and even movies. He has had a wide range of experience, and now his greatest interest and joy is in ministry to the underprivileged, particularly the refugees who come to us at Christ House. That is what gives meaning to his life.

Vijay Wijesundera is a refugee from Sri Lanka and has been separated from his parents and brothers for fourteen years now. He holds a number of higher degrees in physics and math from American universities, but is more concerned now about life than career. A pacifist at heart, he is a conscientious objector when it comes to war and he has been searching for a place, a country, in which his values are best reflected. A UNHCR request

to resettle him in Sweden has been denied by the government of Sweden, and he is searching for other means of fulfillment for the present.

In addition to living and helping at Christ House, he volunteers at the Queen of Peace soup kitchen, the Friends' Shelter, and the Holy Apostles soup kitchen, which is the largest one



*Vijay Wijesundera*

in NYC. He keeps very busy! His favorite pastimes are listening to soft rock music, long distance running/walking, and working in the garden. His plans

for the future are uncertain, but he has embraced his life with us fully for now.

Both of these men have rich and varied life experiences, compassionate hearts, and the in-sights one needs to help the residents move forward and to run the house smoothly. We are very grateful to them for all of this.

#### A N E A S T E R M E S S A G E

*All of us at Christ House wish you blessings of Easter which is upon us. It is the season of new hope, new beginnings, and new life. Let us try to remember that Christ came that we might have life, and have it more abundantly.*

## Network for Refugees

### *How our clients come to us*

Very few of our clients have come to us "off the street." They come by way of referral from Catholic Charities and/or the network of lawyers who are willing to take on such cases "pro bono" but need to find a residence for men in detention; men will not be released until there is someone who will accept responsibility for their keep. The asylum seekers are not eligible for any welfare benefits until their case has been heard and the asylum granted.

This presents a great problem for us because the seekers may not work either, so they are totally dependent

on us. They are eager to work and contribute towards their keep, but they can be deported if found working for a salary.

Why not stay in detention, you might ask? Because it is a jail in fact, and there is little opportunity to communicate with relatives, generally poor medical attention and no opportunity to learn English.

Their case may take months to be heard, and we simply do not have the financial resources to accept some very worthy men who are in this situation.

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