



P.O. Box 97 • Lyons, MI 48851 • (989) 855-2606 • www.leaven.org

nurturing the relationship between spirituality and social justice

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Karen D. Bota

CO-FOUNDERS
Melanie Morrison
Eleanor Morrison

This is an important letter. Please take the time to read it to the end.

October 5, 2011

“It’s not about getting to an end, a destination, as much as it is the way we walk on the path.”

~ Joe Reilly in “Planting Gardens,” a documentary filmed at the Leaven Center (viewable on YouTube)

Dear Leaven Friends,

Over the past 24 years, Leaven Inc. has offered hundreds of workshops focusing on issues of justice, spirituality, and social and personal transformation. Countless people have gathered at Leaven to educate themselves and each other in ways that will nurture their communities at home and create pockets of justice-seeking people throughout the world. In those circles, people have found new hope, allies in the struggle for justice and freedom, and strength they didn’t know they had. Like-minded individuals and organizations have rented the Leaven Center over the past 11 years as a sacred space in which to do their own transformational work.

Without a doubt, Leaven has had a deep and lasting impact on so many of us who count ourselves as part of this community. People tell us again and again how their lives have been changed by Leaven. Difficult conversations have been had here; diverse communities have been forged.

We want to thank YOU --- workshop participants and leaders, renters, donors, supporters, friends and volunteers --- the dreamers and the doers who have helped us build Leaven from its inception. Together, we have been able to create a path toward a more just and sustainable world.

The Leaven board and executive director are deeply committed to the mission and values of the Leaven Center. We celebrate all that Leaven has been, and at the same time feel compelled to look to the future with realistic eyes. It has been our fervent hope as an organization that, despite our financial hurdles, we would eventually be able to “turn the corner” and achieve lasting financial health and sustainability for this beloved organization. We dreamed of continuing and even expanding the innovative programming and hospitality Leaven is respected for.

After much discussion, and careful consideration, the Leaven board is making the difficult decision to close the doors of the Leaven Center and to dissolve Leaven, Inc. Our plan is to honor all rentals and programming already scheduled, and lay Leaven down on January 31, 2012.

Leaven has always been an organization with integrity and high ideals. In light of that tradition we are asking for your help one last time. We would like to close the Leaven Center with integrity, fully supporting the values of justice and ethical treatment of all.

Leaven's director, Karen Bota, has done an outstanding job in the past three years of upholding and expanding the vision of Leaven; of building new relationships with the local communities of Lyons, Muir, Ionia and beyond; of operating the Leaven Center alone as our sole employee; and of inspiring hope despite financial challenges. For the past year, Karen has not been paid in an effort to stay current on the mortgages, utilities and other bills to ensure that Leaven Center could stay open.

When Karen came to Leaven in January 2008, finances were already a struggle. The lack of sizable and stable funding sources; the costs of maintaining two facilities; a shrinking staff; decreasing attendance at workshops, retreats and rentals; and two shifts in leadership; all have taken their toll and have made the ongoing financial commitments more difficult, if not impossible, to sustain.

The overall obligation that Leaven owes includes unpaid salary and benefits to Karen; taxes; monthly mortgage payments on both the Lodge and farmhouse, a balance owed to VISTA for former volunteers; and a balance on a Leaven credit card that had to be used to fill monetary gaps throughout the years. Our total debt is currently \$85,000.

As a matter of justice we are committed to repaying all of Leaven's obligations. We are asking for --- and we need --- your help to do this.

At our last board meeting, we made the decision to:

- List and sell both properties --- the Lodge and the farmhouse --- and all contents;
- Begin this last appeal to raise money to fulfill our financial obligation to Karen, our employee, recognizing both her dedication to Leaven and our responsibility as a justice-seeking and justice-serving organization;
- Settle all other financial obligations.

As board members we have each made a financial contribution to Leaven and have committed to personally inviting and strongly encouraging others to join us in sending a gift, too. *Will you help us by doing the same?*

This will be Leaven's final fundraiser. In the past we have come together to accomplish ambitious fundraising goals; help us to do that this one last time. **Please consider what Leaven has meant to you, and dig deep, so that we can close Leaven's doors with dignity.**

Here are three ways to give:

- Send a check to: Leaven, P.O. Box 97, Lyons, MI 48851.
- Go to the website (www.leaven.org) and use the online pay options on the right-hand column.
- Announce your gift to those you know who are also members of the Leaven community, or who might consider making a first-time donation, and challenge them to donate as well.

We understand that what we are asking is unprecedented. It may seem odd to some to consider making a contribution to an organization that is closing. We hope that to the Leaven community --- seen through the eyes of those who seek justice, equity and a new way of being in the world --- that it will make perfect sense to support to the very end the organization that has encouraged and taught that ideal.

Leaven's work is not complete. Still, we as a board have *hope*! We have *hope* because of each of you. We have *hope* that each of you will continue the work of seeking a just and sustainable world for all. We have *hope* that the Leaven mission and vision will continue through each of you, and that new life will come from what now feels like a death.

How Can You Help?

- Send as generous a financial contribution as you can and invite friends to do the same.
- Offer any expertise that might be helpful during this transition.
- Fulfill a promised pledge: catch up on past payments, pay your 2012 pledge now.
- Buy the Lodge or farmhouse (or tell all of your friends about it). Perhaps your spiritual community, organization or business has considered purchasing property.
- Come to a workshop or individual retreat over the next few months. A few weekends and most weekdays are still open if you would like to schedule time for your own farewell to the Leaven Center. Call or email Karen about this: 989/855-2606, karenbota@leaven.org.
- Help plan the closing celebration on January 29, 2012.
- Attend the closing celebration. There will be more information as plans are confirmed.
- Keep the Leaven board, director and each other in your thoughts and, if you pray, in your prayers in the coming months.
- Communicate with us (board@leaven.org --- include a contact number if you would like a call) and with each other about how you feel about Leaven's closing.
- Remember that the work of Leaven will continue through each of you.

We recognize that many people have personal attachments to items at the Leaven Center. We want to honor all that has been at Leaven by treating the contents with gratitude and respect, and by sending them out into the world as symbols of the work we have done together. We plan to accept donations for items in the Lodge, farmhouse and outbuildings --- more on this to come.

We hope that you will make as generous a donation as you can, and that you will join us January 29, 2012, at the Leaven Lodge for a final celebration.

With gratitude and abundant hope for Leaven and for you,

Sarah Cleaver, Oletha Haller, Vanessa Mitchner, Aaron Wilson-Ahlstrom, Debbie Wollard
Leaven Board of Directors

Karen D. Bota
Executive Director

P.S. If we have an old email address for you and you have **not** been receiving Leaven's email newsletter, please sign up on our website, www.leaven.org: click the blue button in the left column. We will be posting updates through email. Or email Karen: karenbota@leaven.org to be added to the list.