

Dear Friends,

The theme of this past year has been **HOPE**. In 1989, Vaclav Havel wrote:

*“The kind of **hope** I often think about is, I believe, a state of mind, not a state of the world...**Hope** is not a prognostication – it’s an orientation of the spirit...**Hope** in this deep & powerful sense is not the same as joy when things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously destined for early success, but rather an ability to work for something to succeed. **Hope** is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It’s not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. It is this **hope**, above all, that gives us strength to live & to continually try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here & now.”*

[whole quote at bethmin.org/Resources/Reflections]

His words have been a source of grace for us during this past year, as we looked at the state of the world, friends’ sufferings & divisions in churches.

Spirituality & Prayer

As we moved through our 21st year of Prayer, Proclamation & Hospitality, the emphasis of our lives has shifted a bit away from travelling to lead parish missions & retreats & more towards taking time for prayer, ministering to & with groups centered on prayer & being present to the local community. Our time in prayer nourishes our **hope**, & energizes us to reach out in love.

The **contemplative prayer group** based on the 11th Step of AA meets on most Wednesday evenings at the home of **Stasia Hagan**. We continue to reach out in prayer to all who have ever been a part of the group since it began in 1996. Most of those who have been part of it recently continue to attend: **Diane Becker, Don Quinn, Darlene Rinaldo, Mike & Cathy Saccento**. Since **David Nidey’s** job & **Angela Chirico’s** evening studies are over, they have returned, but **Martha Walrach** has recently moved away. Since resuming in the fall, the weekly **NET [Neighbors Eating Together] Suppers** we usually go to before our prayer time are only meeting twice a month, at Our Lady of the Valley and at St. Mark’s Lutheran Church.



For the 4th year now, the **Franciscan Spirituality Group** continues to meet once a month. Usually 12-15 people gather for a rich & deep time of input, faith sharing & prayer. Even between meetings all respond to each other’s needs as we are able, especially during illnesses. Also, Peter & Anna engage in spiritual direction with people regularly both informally & in a more structured way.

We meet 4 times a year in Dingmans Ferry, PA with the **Prayer House Community**, to tend to the hermitage we began 30 yrs ago but even more to pray for & support each other’s spiritual needs. Peter is president of the group, Anna has recently become the secretary & both still take care of the registration for people who want to use the Prayer House for retreat & quiet/contemplative time.



Ecumenical & Interfaith Sharing & Ministry

In January, **2016**, we were asked to lead a funeral in Roscoe, NY, for **Myrna**, a Jewish woman married to a Catholic. Peter sang in Hebrew & wore a yarmulka. Then her husband, **Peter Piccione**, led a decade of the rosary, something they had done together at her request while she was ill.

We have preached frequently at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in Middleburgh while they are between pastors. We participated in the **Middleburgh Baccalaureate** service in the Reformed Church in June & in the **annual village ecumenical service** in July. We were part of the Village-wide **Thanksgiving Ecumenical service** in November at the Catholic Church. We continue to meet once a month with all the clergy of the area to pray, to share life & faith, to plan what we can do together & to sustain each other's **hope**.

Once again we played & sang carols in the shops of Middleburgh during "**Miracle on Main Street**" in early December. For the **2nd** year we did a reflection on the message of Christmas **hope** in the village library, using songs, the violin & many of our puppets to re-tell the story of St. Francis & the first Christmas scene at Greccio, Italy.



Preaching Ministry at Home & on the Road

Besides our ecumenical preaching, we were able to do a **Parish Mission** in March in Wurtsboro [NY Archdiocese]. We led another Mission at Our Lady of Hope in Fort Plain, NY, a parish we often served when they needed a priest. We were very moved by **2 Communal Penance Services** we led, the **1st** on the day before Ash Wednesday at Our Lady of Fatima, in Delanson, NY. It's called "**Pardon & Pancakes**", since the K of C serves a free pancake supper after the service. The other was in Hancock, NY at St Paul's, a parish that was between pastors. In spite of icy roads, **80** people showed up & were deeply healed as they confessed their sins & were absolved.

Our ministry in the **Albany Diocese** continues. We travelled to **18** different parish sites on **32** weekends & feasts. We continue to celebrate Liturgy at the **Black Catholic Apostolate** at St. Joan of Arc Parish in Menands, NY. Their enthusiastic worship & obvious faith increase our **hope** in the power of the Gospel. Several parishes in the Diocese have welcomed us on multiple weekends. This past year we have gone to two campus ministry sites, **3** times to **SUNY Oneonta** & once to **SUNY Albany**. The young respond to the light of the Gospel & seem to derive **hope** from it. We celebrate Eucharist regularly with a **Charismatic community** that meets at St. Paul the Apostle Church in Schenectady, NY.

In July, Anna preached at **2** parishes in Binghamton, NY for the IHM Sisters' **Peruvian mission**. Peter went with her & played the violin for the hymns she used in her presentation. He accompanied the music ministry when not presiding.

It was our privilege to give a **week-long retreat** for the Franciscan Sisters of the Poor in Warwick, NY & participate in the rededication of the outdoor stations there. The house where the Sisters live used to be the House of Prayer for Holy Name Province. Peter was a part of the Friar community there for **10** yrs. Anna was often a guest there while she ministered in Scranton, PA.

Also, we did a **retreat day** for Our Lady of Fatima parishioners at the American Martyrs Shrine in Auriesville, NY; led a **day of prayer** for the Sisters at Villa Fusco in Niskayuna, NY & were a part of **Sr. Caroline Anochirim, OCPB's** jubilee celebration, where Peter played the violin during the Mass. We travelled to St. Mary's, Hoosick Falls, NY to do a **school presentation** & an **evening of reflection** for the adult parishioners. Their pastor, **Fr. Tom Zelker**, whose father was raised on Mill Lane in Middleburgh, is the priest who gave Peter a beautiful stole identical to one lost when Peter's Mill Lane house was flooded in August of **2011**. Peter also served on the Albany men's **Cursillo** team in October.

A Journey of Hope with a Friend

Possibly the most difficult, rewarding & **hope** filled circumstance of our lives this past year was our journey with **Terry**. He had been incarcerated for almost **20** years & we had visited him since **2003** while he was in **3** different prisons. He was scheduled to be released on March **24th**, Holy Thursday. We had made arrangements for him to be picked up at the prison near Utica, NY & brought to NYC, but he was held beyond his release date because his residence had not been approved. He had several court dates to appeal his status but we were able to attend only one. On May **6th**, against many odds, he won his appeal, but there is still more legal work to be completed & red tape to be cleared up.

He was finally released on July **7th**. **Lou Ferreira**, Peter's college classmate, picked him up, drove him to Schoharie, where we met him & treated him to lunch at the Carrot Barn. Another friend, who had been incarcerated many years ago, joined us there. Then we drove him to Brooklyn where he went to an approved residence, stopping in Newburgh to have supper with **Tilda Norberg** & **George McClain**, who had taught him while he was in their Staten Island Prison program.

We have seen him in person twice since then, once at Tilda's **75th** birthday celebration in Manhattan & on Labor Day weekend, when we celebrated his **50th** birthday & Peter's **71st** birthday. We were deeply moved when Terry revealed that though he hadn't had parenting as a child, he gave thanks to God for now being parented by **2** fathers [George & Peter] & **2** mothers [Tilda & Anna]. We talk with him several times a week as we rejoice with his personal & spiritual growth. His research has enabled him to find a course to become a CASAC [**C**redentialed **A**lcoholism & **S**ubstance **A**buse **C**ounselor], but we suffer with him as he experiences the setbacks of dealing with red tape & different agencies' computers that don't communicate with each other.

"Family" Connections

In January, we travelled to NJ, after a Prayer House Community meeting, to take part in a celebration of the engagement of Peter's nephew, **Sean** to his fiancée, **Katie**. The parents of the bride, at whose large home the ceremony took place, were surprised & delighted when Peter, after arriving in street clothes, put on his Franciscan habit for the blessing. We did a special blessing under a heated tent with violin & song. We even spoke a few words of encouragement & wisdom, without calling it a homily. It was really more of an **"espousal,"** the first part [for East Coast family & friends] of a **2** stage wedding that was completed in California in May, which we were unable to attend.

During the year, we visited Peter's **2** aunts in Wappingers Falls, NY several times, usually bringing Communion & anointing them with the Sacrament of the Sick. They call it an **"oil change."** **Delfina, 92**, is now in hospice care & preparing to meet her loved ones who have gone before, especially Peter's mother, to whom she was very close. **Linda** was usually able to join us at Del's or we went to her home. Another time, in a different part of town, we stopped to see Peter's uncle **Rudy** to celebrate those same sacraments with him.

Donald Gaffney, the husband of Anna's cousin, **Joanne**, died suddenly & unexpectedly in July. Thanks to the hospitality of the Friars in Butler, NJ we were able to participate in his wake & funeral, not only to support his family but to begin our own grief process – we loved him deeply. In October, we travelled to Toms River, NJ to join Anna's family to celebrate the **50th** wedding anniversary of her cousins, **John & Tina Barnable**.

We ministered to our 'spiritual family' in the Middleburgh area in many ways. We led & attended funeral services for several people who had almost no one to mourn them & also for **Sue Mueller**, a close friend of Peter's sister **Norma**. We visited **Pedro Lopez**, the father of **Pete Lopez**, our state assembly representative, shortly before he died & later led his funeral service. Since he could not take solid food at the time we gave him **Communion** as the Blood of Christ & anointed him. We also give Communion this way to Mike Saccento though his feeding tube, when we visit him.

IHM & OFM Connections

Peter continues to meet with his Emmaus Fraternity, sometimes by conference call or skype. Accompanied by Anna, he attended the Transitus at Siena & visits the Friary there regularly. One of his **OFM** classmates, **Ignatius Harding**, who was visiting from Bolivia, came & stayed overnight with us & we were able to go to his Jubilee in NYC. Anna continues to connect with her **IHM** Sisters through gatherings of her mission group, attending IHM days in Scranton & live-streamed meetings & retreats she can't attend in person. In June both of us attended Franciscan Contemplative Days at Mt Irenaeus.

Health & Recreation

This summer, we went to a performance of La Boheme at **Glimmerglass Opera** near Cooperstown. We took vacation in Westport, NY & Bolton Landing, NY, attending a chamber music concert in Westport & the **Jazz Festival** in Lake George, visiting the Star Trek exhibit in Ticonderoga, NY as well as just relaxing, going out to eat, fishing [Peter] & photography [Anna]. Peter joined the **Depot Lane Singers**, based 5 miles away & sang in 2 Spring concerts & 3 in December, singing the part of Tevye in a performance of Sabbath Prayer. Aside from winter colds, both of us are in good health for our age.



God's Providential Care

God continues to take care of our needs, even though we do get anxious about bringing in enough to pay our bills. We are not able to travel as far or as much as in the past to do missions & retreats. Our main concern is that now, 6 yrs after the destruction Hurricane Irene caused us, we have used up the money we received from both insurance & donations. That money had helped us to get through this past fiscal year even though we brought in **\$1,120.38** less than we spent because the prices of everything keep going up.

Anna's frugality & Peter's new status as senior Friar-in-residence help a lot but your donations are what make it possible for us to continue our ministry. Our **hope** is strengthened by the fact that God has somehow helped us get from **1995** to **2017**. Thank you for being God's instrument to enable Bethany Ministries to continue its presence to & work for God's people, especially those who fall through the cracks in different support systems.

At the Christmas Eve Mass, with the help of the children present & 9 of our puppets we told a story of **hope**.
It was a story about how we can forget the total Christmas message, which is contained in the phrase,
“You are loved/and so are they.”

[The complete story is on our website bethmin.org/ Resources/Sunday Homilies]

May **2017** be a Year of **Hope** for you and your family.
May you know in the depths of your being that **YOU ARE LOVED**.
May your life be a sign of the **Hope** that you pass on to the world.
Know that our hope-filled prayers accompany you.

Fr. Peter & Sr. Anna

Our **schedule** is on our **website** / our newsletters [some with **pictures**] & our homilies/talks are on the ‘**Resources Page**’

You can find all of our **contact information** below.

THE FRANCISCAN MINISTRY OF THE WORD AT BETHANY MINISTRIES
is how **Friar Peter Chepaitis, OFM** & **Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM** earn their living.

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