



Bethany Ministries

PRAYER, PROCLAMATION, HOSPITALITY

January 2021 – The Story of 2020

Dear Friends,

*♪ When you can't do what you do - You do what you can --
This ain't my prayer, it's just a thought I'm wanting to send
'Round here, we bend but don't break
Down here, we all understand
When you can't do what you do You do what you can. ♪*

This song, by Jon Bon Jovi, sums up most of the year 2020. A version with Jennifer Nettles can be found by following this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HBLAamllyx8>

A Year Like No Other

January began as a continuation of 2019. After celebrating the funeral of **Stasia Hagan** on Jan 2, we gathered with our Franciscan Spirituality Group on the 5th. Our contemplative prayer meeting based on the 11th step of AA met on Mondays at 5:30. The 5 to 8 who attended grew closer to God & each other through the brief meditative reading, 20 minutes of silence & a time of faith sharing. Peter was recovering well from his stroke in Sept, 2019, but was experiencing pain & numbness in both his hands. He began to visit **Sarah Collins**, a chiropractor in Schoharie, just 4 miles from Middleburgh, to receive Active Release Therapy, a kind of massage that he learned of from **Alexandra MacCracken**, a violinist who had found healing for her carpal tunnel issues through it. This gave some relief, but there was still pain. Anna also found relief for issues with her back & arm through visits with Sarah. Because he was trying to avoid surgery, he & Anna began to drive to Albany so he could receive acupuncture. After each bi-weekly session, they would stop at Siena to have lunch with the Friars there. Peter had a test for carpal tunnel on Jan 27th in Cooperstown, an hour away from Middleburgh, & it became clear that he would need surgery on both his hands. The **N.E.T.** (Neighbors Eating Together) dinners continued twice a month at Our Lady of the Valley [OLV] Catholic Church & St. Mark's Lutheran Church.

We finally sent out our yearly newsletter in **February**. We continued to meet with the local pastors of the Lutheran, Reformed & United Methodist congregations on the 2nd Friday of the month, usually at the Middleburgh Diner. The pastoral leaders we met with included **Jeff Kelley** [Reformed Church] **Dave Houck** & **Cheryl Cater** [Lutheran Church] & **Maryellen Moore** [United Methodist Church]. This was a time of sharing faith, talking about what was happening in the community & planning ecumenical events. We find it to be a great support for our faith & ministry. We covered the Masses at OLV on the first weekend of Feb, & went to the Methodist church to attend the funeral of **Billy Connors**, the son of **Linda & Ron Connors**. [Linda is the organist for both the Catholics & the Methodists in Middleburgh]. We both received massages from **Kelly Jordan** in Feb, as we do once a month in order to include ourselves in our response to the call of Christ to love one another. On Feb 22, we travelled to Woodbourne, NY to do the wake & funeral for **Joe Inghrim**, a long time friend of both of us. We were very grateful that we had been able to visit him in July, 2019. **Joe** & his wife **Mary** had been on team doing Marriage Encounters with Peter, even leading one in a prison.

Covid-19 Arrives on the Scene

In **March** our world changed, both our personal lives & the lives of our sisters & brothers all over the world. The 1st part of the month was pretty much a continuation of the previous days. We met at **Don Quinn's** apartment for prayer on the 1st Mon, since he was unable to come to Peter's. The Franciscan Spirituality group met at the church hall of OLV. The NET dinner was held at the same place. On Mar 12, Peter had carpal tunnel surgery on his left hand in Cooperstown. He chose that hand because it was the one he needed most to function so he could play the violin. The **day after**, on Mar 13, **all** elective surgeries were cancelled for Schoharie & Otsego counties. On that same day, we had our last in-person meeting with the local pastors until July.

We had visited **Rick Trendell** on Mar 10, to share the Sacraments of Anointing, Penance & Eucharist. Ten days later, we travelled to Our Lady of Fatima Church in Delanson for his wake & funeral. We were not able to be present at the burial the next day in Albany, but the family was thrilled that **Mike Tyson** [The Friar **not** the boxer] was able to come from Siena in Loudonville to lead the prayers at the graveside. By the end of the month, we were required to stay home except for essential activities. Anna's sister, **Mary** [Sr. **Gerardine, SCC**] was positive with Covid19 & had to be quarantined in her room for a long period of time. It was a comfort that one of the sisters who lives in the convent with her in Passaic, NJ was a nurse.



In **April** we experienced the words of the song at the beginning of this newsletter as we learned new ways to do what we could, even as we were more limited in doing what we used to do. The events of Holy Week could not be held in person. We celebrated those days by watching livestreamed broadcasts from **St. Patrick's** Church in Ravena, NY. This parish had been broadcasting Masses since 1981 when **Fr. Joe Girzone** was pastor there. On Easter Sunday, we watched the Mass from St. Patrick's as two of the members of our spirituality group **Angela Chirico & John Millett**, watched simultaneously from their home. After a wonderful homily by **Fr. Scott VanDerveer**, we stopped the video, shared our reflections on speakerphone & celebrated a Liturgy of the Eucharist.



Our monthly meeting with local pastors took place by conference call. We were sad that we had to cancel the ecumenical events we had done in the past during Holy Week. We also conducted our quarterly meeting with the **Prayer House Community** by conference call. At this meeting, we confirmed our decision to dissolve the "legal non-profit structure" of the Prayer House, but moved towards keeping the community intact. The officers, Peter, Anna & **Janet Stanley**, were asked to complete the process, which took until Jan 13, 2021 to complete. The building had been legally sold a few years ago to **Tilda Norberg & George McClain**, who own the property on the next lot & shared a well with the Prayer House building. **Deborah Keller & Kim Baldwin**, members of the community, were part of the meeting.

As **May** unfolded, the pandemic subsided a little. We were very surprised that Peter was able to have carpal tunnel surgery on his right wrist as scheduled on May 12. It was on that day that elective surgery was opened in the Cobleskill hospital. On May 23, we did a burial service for Stasia Hagan with 12 family & friends attending. The local funeral director made us smile when he told us, "Clergy don't count" [in the number allowed at a burial]. The service was sent by cell phone video to her family members who couldn't be present. On May 25, we prayed over & anointed **John & Mildred Rossman** at OLV Church. Since the

parish in Middleburgh could not have an "in person" Mass, Peter agreed to preside at the Pentecost Mass which was recorded on May 27. **Deacon Gary Riggi** preached & it was put up on the parish facebook page for OLV.

A Summer of Justice & Peace

On **June 4**, Peter got his first haircut since the shutdown. Together with a large number of people from the area we attended a vigil supporting Black Lives Matter in Doc Reilly Park in Cobleskill. NY on the 6th.

On June 8th, the Mass for the Feast of the Body & Blood of Christ, [Corpus Christi] was recorded at the local parish. Peter preached & presided this time & Anna was a lector. It can be found through the following link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVX9AJq76wl>. We both visited **Ron Ruland** on the 13th. He was a Viet Nam vet that Peter had gotten to know while standing at the weekly vigil of the **Peacemakers of Schoharie County**. Observing all the protocols for avoiding the spread of the virus, we celebrated Reconciliation, Anointing & Communion with Ron & his family. The visit ended in hearty laughter, even though Ron was close to death. He passed from life on earth the next day.



July brought some relief from the pandemic, but a sad rise in racist attacks on our black brothers & sisters. We resumed our contemplative prayer meeting, but with only 5 meeting in person & others calling in. This made it possible for **Don Quinn** to call from an assisted living facility in Niskayuna, **Joyce Buonfiglio** from New Windsor, NY, **Bonnie Martin** from near Niagara Falls & **Kim Baldwin** from NYC. On July 15 we celebrated a memorial Mass on the lawn of **Zarko Levak** for his wife, **Milena**, whose funeral we had done on July 16, 2019. About 10 people attended. We also visited two homebound women with **Sena & Frank Monaco** in the late summer.



On July 17 we met with the local pastors in Baker Street Park to plan for the Summer Ecumenical Service on the 27th. That event was held in Timothy Murphy Park. About 75 people participated from lawn chairs & cars. Some brought their dogs. Reggie Harris led the singing & Peter did the "message," after Anna read the Gospel passage. He proclaimed the Good News that **God created only one race, the human race** & that we all are called to care for one another during this time of plague. We believe that healing for both the virus of racism & the pandemic can begin by honoring one another as members of one human family. **Kevin Koller** videoed it for the parish facebook page & Peter's YouTube Channel. This is the link: <https://www.facebook.com/464815553885239/posts/1172114539822000/?vh=e>

New Ways to Welcome, Preach & Connect

In **August**, **Terrence Reid** & his fiancée, **Adrienne** visited from the Bronx. It was a new beginning for our ministry of hospitality because they stayed at a new retreat center a block away from us, a place where we can welcome people for rest, prayer & spiritual growth & they don't have to sleep on a couch or the floor. Once OLV reopened, we covered Masses for 2 of the weekends in Aug because the pastor retired. We both continue to walk as spiritual companions with several people by ZOOM, text, email & phone.



Terrence & Adrienne came back to **Safe Harbor of the Schoharie Valley** [<http://shsv.org/>] for a week in early **September**. Terry went fishing with Peter, caught a good sized bass & relocated the car keys Peter lost. We celebrated both of their Sept birthdays on the 2nd. On the 9th we began holding our Wed prayer meeting at 4:30, so Don could call in before his supper. On the 19th, Anna resumed preaching for the IHM Mission in Sicuani, Peru in the Syracuse Diocese in Holland Patent, NY. Besides accompanying her on the violin this year Peter also recorded a video of her presentation. If you'd like to watch Anna's talk you can follow this link: https://youtu.be/JT_jSaDDzuE.

October 4 was on a Sunday, so we celebrated the Feast of St. Francis with the local parish. It was recorded & can be found on Peter's YouTube channel through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28yU4lwTJQ8> [The opening up to the homily; the song at the end of the homily is cut off because Peter was still learning how to use this medium.] On the 25th we had our 1st "hybrid" meeting of our Spirituality Group, with 8 people meeting in person at Safe Harbor & 4 more joining by ZOOM. We have not been able to meet again, but hope to soon in 2021. **Monica & Mike Short**, who run Safe Harbor, taught Peter how to host ZOOM on the electronics available there & stayed for the meeting to make sure we got through all the glitches.

In **November**, Anna did some physical therapy for her arm in the Cobleskill Hospital. We both watched a concert on computer by Peter's brother, **Stanley** & his wife, **Swana**. Both Anna & Peter were able to stay connected to & involved with their respective religious communities the IHM Sisters & the Friars using ZOOM.

December found us both participating via ZOOM in retreat presentations by Richard Rohr & the Solstice Concert Kim, Reggie & Magpie usually do with other performers. Both of us are part of the new Liturgical Committee at OLV & Peter has been invited to cover Mass there once a month. We were part of Masses for Dec 8th the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. If you follow this link you can see the beginning of the Mass through Peter's homily: https://youtu.be/Ym-8TCyad_l?t=157. Anna's renewal of her vows on that Feast can be found on her YouTube Channel through this link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TtoI5sltXVM>. Other videos of Fr. Peter 's Masses & services can be found on his YouTube channel <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCmiWuY4oJqUvkztbV6Payag/videos>. Of particular note is the Reconciliation Service we led on Dec 19 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HWW89Yt1mvE>.

God's Providential Care in 2020

The hidden gift of 2020 has been a deeper trust in God, even as we saw how fragile both society & church institutions were & felt the limits of our aging & the lessening of our energy. Our prayer, personally & with others has become more important, even essential. As our external ministry decreased, we have been financially supported by generous donations & bequests. We trust that the Lord will continue to bless us through you & in other unexpected ways. But we decided also to cut any excess we could & sold the car we had received as a gift. We have to pay for the upkeep & only use it in the Summer & when we have to travel separately, which we expect will decrease some more.

The pandemic & racial unrest of the past year has opened us to new ways of proclaiming the Good News, especially through our website, text, email & phone communication & compassionate presence to many who seek our prayers. We are responding to the invitation of the song we began with, **"When you can't do what you do, you do what you can."** We are hearing words we have said to others addressed to ourselves in new ways, **"I can't do everything I want to do, but I can do everything God wants me to do."** May the God who loves the whole human race bless you, teach you what you are called to do & give you the vision & strength to do it.

Fr. Peter & Sr. Anna



Winter in Middleburgh



& Fall at Looking Glass Pond

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

Our **website** has - our **schedule** / most past newsletters [with pictures] / our homilies & talks [on the '**Resources Page**'] / other information.

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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Amaryllis blooming in Anna's Apt



Sunset in Middleburgh from the Kitchen in Peter's Apt

May God bless you with wholeness in the midst of divisions

& healing deeper than any pandemic.

May your days be filled with active hope &

may the Spirit of God breathe in you & through you

your every breath now & each day of your life.

a Mass will be offered for you & all your intentions.

Sr. Anna & Fr. Peter



Anna reading at Memorial Mass for Milena Levak



Peter at a Saturday Peace Vigil in Cobleskill, NY