



Bethany Ministries

Winter 2011

Prayer ~ Proclamation ~ Hospitality

Dear Friends,

♪ *O Little Town of Middleburgh ~ your star still shines so bright.
Above the valley from the ridge ~ we see your wondrous light.
Yet when the darkness threatened ~ you found a way to rise.
The hopes & dreams of all the years ~ shine out through you tonight.* ♪

There is an event that happens in Middleburgh every year on a Friday evening before Christmas. It's called "Miracle on Main St." All the businesses and restaurants & the Library are open, there are street vendors & pony rides, and Santa Claus receives the children in front of the barber shop. Almost every year, we travel from one place to another to sing carols accompanied by Peter's violin.

After Hurricane Irene had devastated Middleburgh & Schoharie this year, people began to say to us, "We are going to rebuild our village, & we will not skip Miracle on Main Street because of the flood. You **will** be with us for that, won't you?" It felt like a call from God, so we postponed a weekend retreat so we could be there.

We sang many of the usual carols, & ended our visit to each establishment with the 1st verse of "O Little Town of Bethlehem" and a new verse for that carol we had written just for the town of Middleburgh – the words that began this letter. To understand the meaning of these words, you need to know that there is a huge solar-powered star which sits high on a ridge overlooking the village. It shines white all year, but during the Christmas Season, it alternates between red & green. The people at each place were moved & encouraged by our presence, the carols & the new verse. We began our story of 2011 close to the end of this eventful year. It has been a year of desolation & consolation, but we are still in Schoharie County, & still engaged in following the call that first invited us to begin Bethany Ministries in 1995.

The Giving Tree

On **January 7**, 2011 Peter, riding in a van with Friars from Siena, was returning from the provincial chapter meeting of Holy Name Province. Anna was driving from Middleburgh to Catskill to pick him up in the 1999 Oldsmobile which we were sharing. It was snowing, and Anna had an encounter with slush & a pine tree. She was not injured, but the car was totaled. We were in shock for awhile, but God's timing & sense of humor were truly evident.

Peter had called Anna just the day before to tell her that Bethany Ministries had been offered a 2nd car, a 2001 Subaru Forester, by **Harry Bronkar**, a Baptist minister who had read about our need in the 2010 Newsletter. He was on sabbatical with Peter in Israel in 1993 & is still a part of our extended network. We have been using our "new" car ever since. Every time we pass the tree on Route 145, we thank God for "the giving tree" that got us the insurance money for the '99 Olds that helped us make it through January. [for the rest of the story, look at [The Emmaus Journey of a Car](#) on the reflections page of our website www.bethmin.org]

Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries

In Jan & Feb we helped the people of Holy Cross Parish, Morris, NY grieve the loss of their pastor who died unexpectedly the day after Christmas. We celebrated their Sunday Mass and stayed to walk with the people in their grieving for 5 weeks. From **February 5** until Mar 13, Peter covered for **Fr. Tom Holmes** - the local pastor of Our Lady of the Valley in Middleburgh – while he was recovering from surgery. From January to May, we also led retreat days in Albany, NY, Pittston, PA, Guilderland, NY, & Rosa Mystica house of prayer in Edmeston, NY. We did a parish mission in **March**, at Our Lady of the Blessed Sacrament in Bayside, Queens, NY.

Good Friday, **April 22**, we helped lead the veneration of the cross at an ecumenical service in the Presbyterian Church in Schoharie, NY & celebrated Masses at St. Joseph's, Greenfield Center, NY on Holy Thursday & Holy Saturday as well as 3 Masses on Easter Sunday in Germantown, NY, near where Peter's family lives.

In **May**, we travelled to Michigan to lead the memorial service of Gary Pierce, a long time friend of Bethany Ministries. In 2001, both of us had been asked to participate in the dedication of the Pierce/Cedar Creek Environmental Institute, which he had founded. When it became clear that he was close to death, Gary, though an atheist, asked us to lead his memorial service. He died on April 24th, Easter Sunday, and his memorial service took place on May 9th. It was a glorious celebration of his life and a tribute to his faith in the power of love. [for more information about the 1st 6 months of 2011, go to [2011 mid year update](#)] on our website.

Retreat Time and Prophetic Preparation

In **August**, we went on retreat at the Poor Clare monastery in Wappingers Falls, NY. We had no idea that God was preparing us for an event that would shake us to the core and lead to a deeper vision of the ministry we were called to do. While there, Peter celebrated the Mass for the feast of St. Clare on August 11, with Anna sharing in the homily. Over the weekend, Peter preached

for the foreign missions in a parish close by. As the retreat unfolded, Anna had a sense that there was going to be a major change in our lives and ministry soon, and Peter read a book that deeply affected him and helped him get through the rest of the year. The book -*The Power of Now*, by Eckart Tolle, - and its message has become a theme for both of our lives. On August 21, the last day of the retreat, we travelled back to Schoharie County to preach at an Ecumenical Vespers Service at the Beard's Hollow Church in Richmondville, NY. It turned out to be a prophetic message about the church being more than a building, an institution, a language group or even a noun. When 4 of the 6 church buildings in Middleburgh and Schoharie were severely damaged a week later, some who were at the service recalled our words. [for the complete text, look for [Beards Hollow Church](#) on our website]

The Flood

On August 28, Hurricane Irene came through the Catskills and up the Schoharie valley. We were evacuated, along with the rest of Middleburgh and much of Schoharie County. Peter drove into the village, over the protests of the local sheriff's deputies, to pick up Anna in the Subaru they had received as a gift in January. He had to drive through over a foot of water on the only open street into the village, and thanked God for the "new" car (Their old car wouldn't have made it). Middleburgh's main street was like a raging stream about waist high. Anna's driveway was covered by almost a foot of water. They spent most of Sunday with **Stasia Hagan**, a part of their Thursday evening "prayer & pot luck" group, because there was no way out of the village & her house was on higher ground.

On Monday we saw the one story doublewide mobile home that had been the main ministry site of Bethany Ministries and Peter's residence. Almost everything was lost, except what he took with him when he left the house: his violin, Franciscan habit, laptop computer, a change of clothes, and the Blessed Sacrament. The house looked like a giant blender into which someone had put all of his furniture, appliances, clothes, TV, etc., the contents of his file cabinet, many, many books, along with an over generous amount of water & silt and let it go for hours. Furniture ended up in rooms other than where he had it. It was a real mess!

It was not clear whether the house was structurally sound enough to be rebuilt. Peter's landlord was not able to get there until Tuesday to look at his property and see what the plan will be. He found the house stable enough to renovate, and began to clean it out immediately. No one ever expected this much water. It had rained for about 12-15 hours at 2 inches a minute. And there was sooooo much run-off from the cliffs and small streams that Main Street became a river which severely damaged all of the businesses there. Everybody & every place has been affected by this. Peter stayed in what was Anna's storeroom/guestroom in her 2nd floor apartment until the next storm arrived.

Tropical Storm Lee followed 10 days after Irene hit, and we were evacuated a 2nd time while finishing the list of all the things lost in the flood. **Fred & Kathy Pierson** had gone through the list with the pictures we took & priced each item for the insurance claim. Again, God's timing was perfect, since two days before Lee hit we were offered a place to stay. **Laura Dam**, a friend of **Darlene Rinaldo** (a member of the Bethany Ministries web & the Thursday night prayer group), offered the use of her summer residence, a hundred year old farmhouse on Terrace Mountain outside of Schoharie Village, about 8 miles from Middleburgh. We have been operating out of there ever since.

A Ministry of Presence

Both Peter & Fr. Tom preached together on Labor Day weekend just a week after the flood. The liturgy was a memorable event for all and is still talked about by local residents. As Peter began his part of the homily with "Be Not Afraid," he could barely get through the words "If you pass through raging waters in the sea, you shall not drown..." without choking up & there were many tears among the people. During the homily Peter & Tom encouraged the people, cried with them and challenged them to continue to care for each other, while Anna did the same with the congregation both before & after Mass.

Since the flood, our preaching ministry has consisted in going to Albany Diocesan parishes and taking part in Ecumenical events, but most of our ministry has been a "ministry of presence." For two and a half months the pastor & parishioners of Our Lady of the Valley Catholic parish provided lunch every day & hot meals 3 or 4 nights a week, using donated food & volunteer labor. We often went to the meals, mingled with & listened to those eating there.

September 30th, the Knights of Columbus Council, Delanson, NY gave a benefit dinner for Bethany Ministries. Peter had become their chaplain in May. He was the "strolling violinist" during the meal, while Anna went around & listened to people's stories. The line was long & the benefit raised over \$2,000. We used it to help some members of the Bethany Ministries web of relationships that were also hit by Irene —**Angela Warbach** and **Kim & Reggie Harris** (who had lost the bridge from the road to their house).

The animal puppet collection that we use in our ministry was lost in the flood so we established an "adopt a puppet" program. When people adopt a puppet animal by donating its cost, that person's name is placed on that puppet. **Patty Eddy-Beal**, the owner of The Conglomerate was the first one to urge other business owners on Main Street to put signs "*We will re-open*" in their windows as they dug out. We are getting most of our new puppets from her.

Our car needed new snow tires so we got them at another local business -Lenny's Tire Service- which was very battered by the flood. The sign in their window reads "*Come hell or high water, we will survive!*" During **October**, Peter often used flood stories in homilies at parishes he covered. During the week as we go about our daily chores in town around Main Street in Middleburgh we

often simply stop & talk with people –the customers, workers, and store owners in various stages of rebuilding. We would also stop at Peter’s damaged house to encourage his landlord in his work. While doing this, we listened to the story of the family across the road from Peter, a husband, wife & 4 children who had just bought & moved into the house a few months before the flood. To help with their rebuilding it we were able to connect them with donors who provided gift cards & certificates from local stores.

In **November**, we participated in two Ecumenical Thanksgiving Services, one in Morris, where Peter was the guest preacher & one in Middleburgh attended by a very diverse congregation which had shared both a disaster & a surge of caring in the previous months. In place of a sermon there was an amazing open sharing of what people were grateful for since Irene first came to the valley.

God’s Providential Care

At the end of our fiscal year, June 30, 2011, we were \$1.07 in the black. Financially, the dust has not yet settled after the flood. We received a settlement from insurance policies held by Holy Name Province. We will pay the expenses of replacing things & moving back into Peter’s house from this money. A member of Peter’s Emmaus Fraternity, **Fr. Jim Kelly, OFM** donated furniture & kitchen utensils which are waiting in a POD till the house is ready.

Even though we did not have any missions or retreats this fall, unsolicited donations after the flood have paid our regular bills to date, but donations are still welcome & needed. Based on the recommendation of our Advisory Board (Barbara Chepaitis, Rose Marie Mozzachia, IHM, Russel Murray, OFM), we plan to place any unused insurance money in a savings account to supplement our regular income & provide for our needs into the future.

What we thought would be our second car has been the one car we are sharing this year, so we are still looking for another car so that we can travel to our ministry & community commitments.

We hope to be back in our primary ministry site/Peter’s residence by mid February. Please keep us in your prayers that all goes well. May the Lord bless you and your family with the grace to live in the **NOW**, and may every crisis and disaster lead to a resurrection and new life.

Fr. Peter & Sr. Anna

[A more detailed account of the flood & pictures are on facebook under Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries page.]

THE FRANCISCAN MINISTRY OF THE WORD AT BETHANY MINISTRIES
 is how **Friar Peter S. Chepaitis, OFM** & **Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM** earn their living.
 You can find the **website** with all of our contact information below.
BETHANY MINISTRIES ✘ **P.O. Box 432** ✘ **MIDDLEBURGH, NY 12122-0432**
 Phone (518)827-4699 ✘ E-Mail bethmin@midtel.net ✘ Website www.bethmin.org
 [Donations made to **Bethany Ministries** are tax deductible]



Welcoming Guests Pre-Flood



The Day After the Flood-August 29, 2011 [the date stamp is wrong]

Present State of Repair

