



Bethany Ministries

January 2016 – The Story of 2015

Prayer ~ Proclamation ~ Hospitality

Dear Friends,

This song has been singing itself in our hearts for much of **2015**:

♪ If all the world were peaceful now, and forevermore.
Peaceful at the surface, and peaceful at the core.
Then all the joy within my heart would be so free to soar.
And we're living on a living planet, circling a living star.
I don't know where we're going, but I know we're going far.
AND WE CAN CHANGE THE UNIVERSE BY BEIN' WHO WE ARE
And we're living on a living planet, circling a living star ♪

The title is "Living Planet" by Jay Mankita. We've often heard it sung by our friends **Greg Artzner & Terry Leonino** [aka Magpie] and **Kim & Reggie Harris**. It describes a core part of the message we've been called to share with many individuals, congregations & groups over the past year as well as our experience of ecumenical & interfaith sharing.

20th Anniversary Celebration

In August we realized that **2015** marked the **20th** anniversary of Bethany Ministries. We first celebrated with the local ministers in Peter's apartment on Grove St. Then we celebrated with Our Lady of the Valley Parish on a Sunday when Peter was covering for **Fr. Matt Wetsel**, the young pastor who was on vacation. We created a 4 page summary of our **20** yrs. [pictures included] & sent it to some of those who receive our yearly newsletter. You can find it on our website by clicking on the 20 year story on our home page. If you wish to have a paper copy of it, call or write & we'll send it to you.

Ecumenical Sharing & Ministry

Our monthly meetings with the local pastors in Middleburgh have been times of deep faith sharing & practical planning. During Lent, we volunteered to do a kind of Parish Mission on **4** successive Wednesdays. We called it *Ecumenical Lenten Reflection & Ritual* [**Lenten R & R** for short]. Each week we did one of our **4** usual mission themes: Love, Mercy, Healing & Evangelization, right after the regular Wednesday community [**Neighbors Eating Together**] suppers at each of the **4** churches in the village.

Every presentation was followed by a ritual which put the theme into action. We began in the Lutheran fellowship hall, then to the Reformed Church. Next was Our Lady of the Valley Catholic Parish & finally the United Methodists Church. Even the local mayor was able to be at some of the evenings. We met people on the street who talk about what they had experienced & how they had been blessed.

When the pastor of the Lutheran Church was transferred, he recommended us as preachers for some of their Sunday services while they were looking for his successor. We have had the joy of giving "The Message" at **4** Sunday services this past year – May **3**, Aug **2**, Nov **1** & Dec **20**. We will return there on Jan **31**, **2016**.

For the feast of All Saints we reflected on the Beatitudes with puppets & song, then for the **4th** Sunday of Advent we helped the congregation transition from Advent to Christmas.

Other ecumenical & interfaith events that we were blessed to be part of in **2015** included giving a blessing & reflection at the swearing in of New York State Assembly Member **Pete Lopez** in Jan; Schoharie's ecumenical Good Friday service in April; the Baccalaureate celebration for Middleburgh HS in June; the village wide ecumenical service in August; & the Middleburgh Thanksgiving Ecumenical Service in Nov – at which we gave the reflection.

There was also the annual Middleburgh Friday in December "Miracle-on-Main-Street" evening – when we shared our Gospel Values by telling stories with music & puppets in the library as well as going from store to store singing & playing carols.

Preaching Ministry at Home & On-the-Road

Besides our ecumenical preaching, we were able to do a Parish Mission in October in Tupper Lake, NY [Ogdensburg Diocese]. It was for two linked parishes & we combined the preliminary meeting in early Sept with a visit to The Wild Center. Since the Bishop would be visiting the parish on the mission weekend we made an extra trip the weekend before to preach at all the Masses. We believe that this circumstance increased attendance at the evening services during the rest of the Parish Mission week.

Our ministry to the Albany Diocese continues. We both travelled to **15** different parishes on **37** weekends & feasts. Although Peter was ordinarily the presider & homilist, Anna's presence was a gift to the parishioners, as she listened to & mingled with them.

The parishes we visited most often were Our Lady of the Valley in Middleburgh & Our Lady of Fatima in Delanson. Since he arrived in June, **2014**, Fr. Matt Wetsel has served as pastor in Middleburgh & also as sacramental minister in Delanson [where **Mrs Lynn O'Rourke** serves as Parish Life Director]. He regularly asks Peter to cover when he is on retreat or away for a day. He & Peter collaborate to cover all the Holy Week Services & the Christmas Masses in both parishes.

One of our most favorite places to go is to the Black Catholic Apostolate at Saint Joan of Arc Parish in Menands, NY. We went there **6** times during **2015** & were asked to do a funeral there in Sept while the pastor, **Fr. Kofi Ntsiful-Amisah** was visiting home in Africa. One Sunday we celebrated Mass with them was Peter's birthday & they surprised him with a reception & a great meal after the Mass.

We taught two courses on Ecclesiology in April & May for the Kateri Institute of the Albany Diocese & led a day of recollection for the Sisters at Villa Fusco, Niskayuna, NY [who are from Africa & India].

In October, we did a presentation on Saint Junipero Serra at the parish in Middleburgh & at Our Lady of Grace Parish in Ballston Lake, NY we did an evening on St. Francis, St. Clare & St. Junipero.

We helped plan & celebrate the yearly Reconciliation Service at Our Lady of Fatima Parish. It's called "*Pardon & Pancakes*" & happens the evening before Ash Wed. The service precedes a pancake supper prepared by the local council of the K of C. Peter also assisted at Advent & Lenten Penance Services at Our Lady of Hope in Fort Plain, NY & Our Lady of the Valley, Middleburgh.

Ministry of Presence Continues

We continue to live our ministry of presence to the local community & the parish in the Middleburgh area. This year, thanks to the generosity of the Joshua Project, we have gift cards to help some local people financially when a small need presents itself.

While covering for the local pastor's free day, we have been asked by him & area funeral directors to lead several unusual funerals. At one of them, the deceased was a professional pool player & was buried in his team's shirt. His widow was born in France, so we read the Gospel & prayed a Hail Mary in French. She joined in, even though she claimed she'd forgotten all her prayers because it was so long since she had been to church.

The author of the "Joshua" series, **Fr. Joe Girzone**, recently died. We attended & helped with the funeral Mass music ministry, at the request of **Deacon Gary Riggi** – who serves the Middleburgh parish & administers the Joshua Project [funded by the Joshua series]. Peter also played the violin at the burial which took place at the Joshua House property & both of us sang the *Blessing of Clare* as part of the burial.

Spirituality & Prayer

Our contemplative prayer group, based on the 11th Step of AA, continues to meet on most Wednesdays. The group now includes **Stasia Hagan, Don Quinn, Diane Becker, David Nidey, Mike & Cathy Saccento, Martha Walrath, & Darlene Rinaldo**. After we eat together at one of the local churches at the N.E.T. supper, we meet at Stasia's house for prayer that includes 20 minutes of contemplative silence.

The Franciscan Spirituality Group has been meeting once a month for over 2 years. Around 12-14 people come together from Delanson, Middleburgh, Schoharie, & Scotia in rotating locations to share faith & prayer at an ever deepening level.

This year we went on retreat together at Mt Irenaeus, a spiritual center near Olean, NY sponsored by HNP. We each had our own hermitage, & we joined the community for meals & prayer. It was a wonderful week of spiritual growth & faith sharing in a very beautiful mountain setting. We were fed both spiritually & theologically by attending *Spring Enrichment*; & the *Autumn Diocesan Gathering*; sponsored by the Catholic Diocese of Albany, NY.

Seeds Planted & Bearing Fruit

We travelled to Buffalo to attend the Timon/St Jude HS Musical Reunion. **Jerry Kegler** received an award. He sang in the 1st musical Peter directed & then began serving as the technical director shortly after he graduated in 1973 [he has served in that capacity every year since]. We prepared & celebrated Sunday Mass for graduates, students & parents in the school chapel. Several of Peter's former students are now directing & producing the current musicals. Others are on the board of directors of the school & one is the current principal.

Our longtime friend & supporter, **Rick Lesser**, was ordained a priest in June, at the Albany Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception. He is the person who hosted Peter's "*little brother*" some years ago. Check our 2008 Newsletter on our website for that whole story.

Peter is a regular spiritual companion for 7 people – including someone who has been incarcerated for years & is scheduled to be released **Mar 24**. Peter is advocating to find him temporary housing in the NYC area & is helping him prepare to become a Catholic.

IHM & OFM Connections

In July, we went to Scranton, PA, to take part in a week long convocation of the 3 IHM Congregations & the Oblates of Providence [the 1st Catholic Congregation of Black Women in the world]. One of their Sisters founded the original IHM Sisters, which later became 3 separate Congregations. These 4 groups of women religious convene every 10 yrs. It was an amazing experience to share faith with & learn about the past & current activities of each of the Congregations.

Right after that, we met for 3 days in Philadelphia with the JPIC [Justice, Peace & Integrity of Creation] ministry of Holy Name Province. We continue to take advantage of opportunities for continuing education provided by both our IHM & OFM Communities.

Peter continues to meet with the Emmaus Fraternity & for the 1st time was invited to the OFM Guardians & Pastors meeting as the liaison for his fraternity of Friars who live singly. He also attended the Jubilee celebration for the Friars of HNP in NYC.

We traveled to Scranton for a contemplative workshop, & also experienced a retreat via the IHM Sister's live streaming. We heard Elizabeth Johnson speak at Siena College in preparation for Pope Francis issuing *Laudato Si, On Care For Our Common Home*, his encyclical on the environment. Anna continues to meet with her IHM Mission Group & attend other IHM congregational gatherings.

Health & Vacation

Peter spent the 1st months of 2015 recovering from his Dec surgery. The anesthesia stayed in his system for a while, & required daily naps. He had follow up tests, & they did not reveal anything that looked like a problem. However, some acid reflux was detected.

The aging process has slowed both of us down; but we continue to do retreats & parish missions as enthusiastically as we ever did. We are as effective as before & perhaps even more, but we cannot do as many as we used to & need longer to recover our energy.

This year's vacation began doing the new Wild Walk at The Wild Center [Tupper Lake]. Then we drove to Westport, NY [on Lake Champlain] to spend time with a minister friend of ours. We drove from there to Lake George to attend the Jazz Festival & stay at a cabin belonging to Peter's grammar & HS classmate **Jean Brew** & her husband, **Bob**.

God's Providential Care

Your generous support for us fills us with gratitude. We are always looking for some more parish missions to do & depend on your monthly, occasional & yearly gifts to our ministry. We faced a severe shortfall in August, but your response to our appeal & your Christmas gifts made it possible for us to pay all our **2015** bills & continues to help us provide the money we send in to support our Religious Congregations, especially our retired Sisters & Friars.

We ask for your continued prayers & financial support which will enable Bethany Ministries to continue to be a blessing to the people we are called to serve, both here in the Albany Diocese & wherever the Spirit sends us to bring the Good News of God's Love & Mercy. May the Mercy & Love of God fill *your* lives & *your* hearts. ~ May the presence & power of the Spirit enable all of you —

to change the universe by being who you are.

Fr. Peter & Sr. Anna

Our **schedule** is on our **website** & we often post homilies on its '**Resources Page**' & indicate when we do on our **Facebook** page

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

THE FRANCISCAN MINISTRY OF THE WORD AT BETHANY MINISTRIES

is how **Friar Peter S. Chepaitis, OFM** & **Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM** earn their living.

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