

## Bethany Ministries: The First Six Months

As I returned from a meeting with the Ministry of the Word, in St. Petersburg, (Florida, not Russia) the plane couldn't land in Albany and I spent the night in Pittsburgh.

Kateri (Kathy Maus) picked me up the next day and we arrived at my house on Mill lane only to find my car buried and the house without heat . . . 1996 had begun.

Bethany Ministries began as a dream of contemplative balance between preaching and prayer and is growing into an experience of collaboration and a new vision of community.

## Prayer

There have regular and extended times for prayer in solitude, especially in the early morning.

Liturgy of the Hours has become the most regular form of common prayer, and the inclusive translation recently completed by the International Committee on English in the Liturgy (ICEL), has been the one most used (Psalms for Morning and Evening Prayer, Liturgy Training Publications, 1995).

During the late summer and early fall, it was possible to celebrate Eucharist with guests on nearby mountains and close to local waterfalls. There have been regular periods of communal prayer in silence or prayer of centering which seem to signal a movement toward communal contemplation.

One of the early biographers of Francis speaks of him as becoming a prayer rather than praying (Thomas of Celano, *The Second Life of St. Francis*, #95).

The times of quiet prayer I have experienced here in the past six months, both in solitude and with others, have moved towards prayer of *being* rather than of saying or even of seeing. This prayer has emerged from experiences of relationship and of ministry and, in its own way, has become a ministry to those who share it and to those who are brought into it, whether consciously or not.

As I go out from this house to preach, I am more conscious than ever that my whole being speaks the Gospel (or impedes it), and that the prayer life of Bethany Ministries is the heart of the ministry that emerges from it.

## Community

The life of a Franciscan hermit is not an isolated one.

In the rule Francis wrote, "the brothers were expected to eat and pray together." As Bethany Ministries begins a new year, the Holy Spirit is creating a web of relationships with both inner and outer strands.

The day to day prayer and ministry includes Kathy Maus (Kateri), who left her home and moved here in September, 1995, Anna Tantsits, IHM, who has been a regular visitor during her sabbatical and Sr. Joan Curley, CSJ, who is Parochial Administrator of St. Joseph's Church, five miles away from Middleburgh.

Arlene and Steve Shako have participated in the ministry of prayer and hospitality.

Fr. Tom Berardi, pastor of St. Vincent's Church in Cobleskill and "dean" of the parishes in the county, has helped me keep my boundaries clear with regard to helping in local parishes, and keeps reminding me of the real need for a ministry of prayer in Schoharie County.

Both he and Jerry Marten, a retired NYC policeman, have been particularly supportive and interested in the development of Bethany Ministries.

One of the delightful surprises of these past months has been the active participation of my family in the beginnings of this adventure. My three sisters and my brother, along with their families have helped me move twice and contributed in many other tangible and intangible ways.

Another grace has been the interest and support of four of my Siena College classmates and their families.

I have been able to connect with my Friar community at least once a month, by traveling to New Jersey to attend the solemn profession celebration in September, by joining the Friars at Butler, N.J. for an Advent day of recollection and, in December, I was warmly welcomed for the Eucharist and Christmas party with the community at Siena.

Finally, people from many parts of the country, from California to Florida and from New Jersey to Buffalo, have been in contact by phone and letter and have been part of the extended web of Bethany Ministries through their prayer and financial support.

*From Kateri Maus*

Dear Friends,

On September 21, 1995, I moved to Middleburgh without a job or a place to live. The call from God was, and continues to be strong. I was being called out on a spiritual limb.

I had been laid off from my job at Alcohol and Drug Dependence Services in Buffalo, N.Y., on April 1, 1995, and by September I still did not have a job. After a number of fruitless interviews, my unemployment was running out.

Peter and other members of Bethany ministries were generous in opening up their homes to me during this time of transition and offered much encouragement about trusting God.

My unemployment insurance ended in October and for one week I was without any income. I was then offered a position at "The Next Step," a recovery program for women in Albany.

In mid-November I moved into my own place on 16 acres of land about three miles from Peter's house and on higher ground. I was able to offer hospitality to Peter when his house was surrounded by the Schoharie creek.

I am constantly fascinated with the wildlife, especially

continued on Page 3

### **Your Support is still Essential**

Bethany Ministries continues to depend on God's providence through your donations.

The prayer and encouragement of so many people who believe in prayer and mutual collaboration has empowered the adventure to continue to mature.

The financial gifts we have received in the last six months have been generous and timely, and have inspired much grateful prayer.

Any future donations will not only make it possible to keep our focus on prayer, they will enable us to engage more people in collaborative ministry.

In particular, financial support through donations makes it possible to bring more lay persons and sisters into the preaching ministry.

\*\*\*[Please make out checks to Franciscan Friars rather than to Bethany Ministries. My affiliation with the Friars makes it possible for your donations to be tax deductible.]

\*\*\* Since this newsletter was published, Bethany Ministries has established its own account.

First Six Months, continued from Page 1

### **Collaboration**

The most memorable and exciting experience of collaboration has been the creation and performance of a program for the Feast of St. Francis which we called "The Prayers of St. Francis: Embracing the Humanity of Christ."

An hour long dramatic prayer through music, story and song, it was an attempt to bring to life the call and spirit of both St. Francis and St. Clare, the founders of the Franciscan movement. The four or five scenes were collaboratively created by Kateri Maus, Barbara Chepaitis and myself.

The initial performance was sponsored by St. Catherine's Parish in Middleburgh, and consisted of four scenes:

1. Francis embraces the Call;
2. Francis embraces the Leper;
3. Francis embraces the brothers (and sisters); and
4. Francis embraces his own body (the story of the Stigmata and his "Transitus" or death scene).

We repeated the performance, in November, at the Breakabeen Presbyterian Church and, in December, at Corpus Christi Church in Clifton Park, adding a scene: Francis embraces Christ through the liturgy of the Church (the first Creche at Greccio).

Each performance has been a deeply moving spiritual experience for us as well as for those who came, and there have been several requests from other Catholic and Protestant communities to repeat it.

At the request of the Ministry of the Word, I gave two week-long programs in collaboration with parish communities: The St. Jude Novena at St. Stephen of Hungary Parish in NYC, during August, and a Parish Mission for Mother of Divine Grace Church, in Buffalo, during Advent.

I collaborated with the parishes of Schoharie County by being presider and preacher for at least two and at most four Masses during twelve weekends from July through December, as well as for Christmas.

This was a particular help to the county and the Diocese because the pastor of St. Catherine's (and regular sacramental minister for St. Joseph's) was on sick leave from late September through December.

With the help of Fr. Tom Berardi and two Friars from the Ministry of the Word, I was able to avoid getting so involved in parish ministry that it interfered with prayer and the ministry of hospitality.

continued on Page 3

From Kateri Maus, continued from Page 2  
with the lynx I spotted from my bedroom window.

Peter has caught trout in the stream below my house and can't wait for the Spring thaw.

The transition has been very difficult. My family of origin continues to have much difficulty in accepting my decision to become a part of Bethany Ministries.

I cling to the promise of the Scriptures, especially the passage from Matthew 10:37-39, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

I also find challenge and hope in the words which inspired Francis of Assisi, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Mt. 16:24-25).

I continue to feel God's call in my life. It is very difficult to follow that call at times: when the furnace keeps breaking down, wading through knee deep snow with groceries, no water, etc.

At times I would feel angry with God and that call that still lives deep in my heart. Yet, it is through all of these "trials" that God's call is made stronger.

Bethany Ministries has also allowed the artist within me to begin to emerge: simple wood carvings and wall hangings, the opportunity to sing and play at Masses in local parishes, the chance to participate in creating and presenting a prayerful reflection in story and song on the lives of Francis and Clare.

The transition is difficult, but the growth is worth it. Thank you for your support. I am hoping to see and meet many of you in the future. You are remembered in my prayers.

Love, *Kateri*

*As the days begin to lengthen,  
and Spring is in our dreams,  
may the light of God shine  
on you, walk with you and  
be visible in you.*

First Six Months, continued from Page 2

### **Hospitality:**

Guests at my residence (on Mill Lane) have begun to come on a regular basis.

From September through December, 17 guests stayed for 126 overnights. In addition, there were about 50 day visits by over 40 different people.

Ministry to guests has included both ongoing and occasional spiritual direction, directed retreats, celebrating Eucharist and reconciliation and collaboration in the household tasks.

Sr. Joan continues to welcome sisters to stay in her parish house and Kateri has begun to offer hospitality at her residence.

Other experiences of collaboration have included two Marriage Encounter Programs (teaming a "Re-Encounter", and attending a leaders's meeting), assisting at a retreat for survivors of sexual abuse, a men's retreat at Mill lane with four of my classmates from Siena, and presiding at Eucharist at Wellsprings, a sabbatical program for Christian ministers.

My own spiritual and ministerial life has been nurtured by a course in Gestalt Pastoral Care, which began with a retreat, meets once a month in Staten Island and will last for two years.

In this winter pause between Christmas and Lent, I look back with gratitude at all that God has accomplished. I thank the Lord daily that I am living here in Middleburgh, instead of farther into the woods.

My landlord has been extremely helpful and the house is quite manageable. I survived the flood of January, 1996, with minimal damage, even though the water came within inches of coming into my living room.

It takes some work to balance prayer, collaboration in ministry, hospitality and travel, but the Lord is giving me sisters and brothers to share the dream and the work.

When I sent my financial report to Holy Name Province, I was happy to find that in the first six months, from July to December, I took in about \$1,300 more than I spent. Around \$6,000 came from stipends for ministry, and \$4,800 from donations.

However, as February approaches, most of that has been spent and January is a slow month for both parish and retreat ministry.

Please continue to pray for Bethany Ministries, as I will for you and your intentions.

Peace and Good, *Peter*, OFM