

Dear Friends of Bethany Ministries,

The phone rang, and my message started: "The Lord give you peace. Please pray for me as I spend a week on retreat. If you leave a message after the beep, I'll get back to you as soon as God allows."

I didn't hear my phone machine answer the call, but a few minutes later, I heard a knock on the door, and Kathy appeared. I knew she would not have interrupted my retreat time unless it was something very urgent.

And it was: Anna's mom had been taken to the hospital in New Jersey and was not expected to last through the night. I was doing my own retreat in a guest room at my hermitage in Middleburgh because I had broken my ankle on the Sunday before Memorial Day, right after celebrating Eucharist with seven guests and visitors.

My ankle was still in a cast, and I had just returned from the Friars' Provincial Chapter meeting at Siena. So much for my careful planning!

After I called Anna and packed for a hospital visit and possible funeral, Kathy drove to Guilderland with me,

From Angela Warbach

Angela is a member of the Refounding Core Team of Bethany Ministries. She lives with her husband, Ron and their two daughters, Cassie (8) and Rhianna (6), near Gallupville, NY. She home schools her daughters and is a member of St. Joseph's Parish in Schoharie, NY.

My daughters and I have been going to Mass about once a month for the last year at Bethany Ministries. Along the way I have sensed that God has been offering us some very precious and unique gifts through this intimate experience of the Mass.

It seemed that my daughters were naturally inquisitive about this close up view of the Mass and enjoyed the explanations as we went along.

Sr. Anna has taken the time to explain to them some of the gestures used during Mass, such as signing your forehead, lips and heart with your thumb before the Gospel is read.

She taught us to sing "Your word O Lord be in my mind, and on my lips, and in my heart," while doing a

prepared to drive us all to New Jersey in the middle of the night, since neither Anna nor I were capable of driving.

Just before we left Anna's house at around 11 PM, a call came in telling us that Mrs. Tantsits had rallied and was not in immediate danger of death, so we drove to Middleburgh and left for New Jersey in the morning.

Anna's mom recovered and continues to live at home. Through it all we heard God saying: "I am in charge of building and planning for Bethany Ministries" and "I have built you into a community."

Since the last newsletter, almost a year ago, Bethany Ministries has been growing and listening for God's direction.

The ministries of Prayer, Hospitality and Proclamation continue to describe who we are and what we do, and have gotten more specific.

Three ministers of prayer have been commissioned: Mary Tantsits, Anna's mom; Patricia Grace Voss, who is in her fifties and is completely homebound; and Mary Piccione, a widow who visits Middleburgh for spiritual renewal when she is not ministering to her children in the U.S and Australia.

The ministry of hospitality has embraced people such as Rose, who traveled from a halfway house to begin her journey to becoming a Catholic here, and Roger, who came for a weekend to find direction for his life, and whom we visited in the county jail when he needed support.

The ministry of proclamation has included an interfaith National Conference of Marriage Encounter, the second annual Schoharie County ecumenical Tent Meetings, a retreat in a local prison, and one for persons with developmental disabilities.

Anna and I did our first Parish Mission in the city of Albany at Our Lady of Mercy Parish in September.

The Rule for Hermitages continues to be the Franciscan expression of our life, and I have started a conversation with Friars in my province, who are living "singly" like me, about how our lives are an expression of Franciscan Spirituality rather than an exception to it.

We have been privileged to reach out to people who fall through the cracks, and to minister to those who

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“thumb prayer”. This simple teaching, I am sure, will stay with them for a lifetime.

While the Mass at the hermitage maintains the usual order of prayers and praises there is also opportunity for questions and time for sharing the meaning of the Gospel.

I can feel the essence of discipleship come alive, as a room full of people begins to explore what the words of Christ mean to them. Even the children are included and validated as having something of value to offer during the sharing.

Often Fr. Peter will explain words or gestures used in the Mass. This not only helps the children understand, but enlivens my experience of the Mass every Sunday. I am delighted when I see and hear my daughters playing out what they have learned

Often I hear them singing hymns of praise, or pretending to share communion as they prepare for their First Communion. They especially enjoy the task of carrying the hand washing tray (for a ritual practiced at Bethany Ministries which recalls the story of Jesus washing his disciples' feet). They want to help, and they know that they can contribute to something meaningful. It seems now when they play in this way they are “praying their play”.

These are just some of the gifts that we have received from God through our participation in Bethany Ministries.

Presently, I am both astonished by God's grace in all of this and am immeasurably grateful for the opportunity to grow in faith as I have in the last year. God seems to have provided more than I have asked for in meeting my desire to nurture my children spiritually and to share in meaningful community.

God has created for us a satisfying, many layered experience. Going to the hermitage monthly for Mass has increased our understanding of God's Word through our sharing the Gospel and communion.

We have learned how to praise God openly. We are truly sharing in the wonder of God's sacred creation and nurturing care. We continue to attend Mass at our local parish every Sunday and are enjoying ourselves as we become a part of this larger family.

As I reflect upon this past year, I am grateful for the sense of community we have experienced through our connection with Bethany Ministries, and for the chance to share God's Word, and experience it coming alive in our lives.

Angela Warbach

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cannot repay us financially but bless us spiritually.

We continue to collaborate as peers, so we can give flesh and form to the vision of a world where people of all religious traditions can pray together; of a Church where women and men, clergy and lay can proclaim the love of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ together; of a community which offers hospitality not only to outside guests but to each other.

Peace and Good,
Friar Peter Chepaitis, OFM

From Kathy Maus

Hi Everyone!

At different times during the year, I feel the need for a more intense time of retreat and spiritual renewal.

From August 20th to the 22nd, Angela Warbach, her two daughters, Rhia and Cassie, Diane Cotton and I traveled from Schoharie county to participate in the Council of Women. It took place at a camp on a small lake in Maine about an hour outside of Portland.

Women of all ages, from three to their late seventies, took part in workshops, rituals, and talking circles all rooted in the Native American tradition.

For two days women shared the honor of beating a traditional Native American drum, simulating the heartbeat of Mother Earth.

Workshops and talking circles included such interests as drumming, celebrating the changing of the seasons and holidays, and dancing.

The spirit of the council was one of celebration and reverence; celebrating ourselves as women and revering and respecting creation, each other and our Higher Power.

Those who chose to made prayer flags: cloth flags on which individuals wrote their prayer intentions for the year. The flags will hang outside for a year so the Wind may carry the prayers to the Great Spirit.

The flags will then be burned in the ceremonial fire at next year's Council of Women.

By Sunday afternoon I felt very grounded and peaceful and I enjoyed my ride home as a time of meditation.

I look forward to attending next year.

Peace, *Kathy Maus*

Dear Friends,

God seems to be highlighting the ministry of *Proclamation* for me just now through some changes in my position with the Roman Catholic diocese of Albany.

My title has been changed to Associate Director: Evangelization and Adult Catechesis and there is a new thrust to my job description and goals.

The Evangelists – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – were the ones who told Jesus' story and began to spread the Good News.

My new job is to help the people of the Albany Diocese know that all who are baptized are called to Evangelize – to spread the Good News, not just to keep it for ourselves.

You can be part of the ministry of Proclamation when you share the Good News you have received with someone today!

Peace and Good, Anna Tantsits, IHM

Hospitality Prayer

Ancient wisdom,

Breath of coincidence,

Keeper of the winds, All people,

We breathe you Great Breath

And are breathed by you

into bodies that have wisdom.

We are the patter of the sky, the water, the land,

the wind and fire.

Dragonflies die of drought and we go with them.

The hurricane grows large and moves closer

To the land that we are made of.

How much of me is in the hurricane?

How much of the hurricane is in me,

will roll over me?

The eye of the storm

Is the willingness of the heart to see and know,

hear and sing, act and be in stillness.

I don't know my name

but today I know yours

as I listen to the breath of friends,

breath of life, of all people,

the breath of love

of wind.

by Barbara Chepaitis

Reflecting the group's prayer and sharing during the
Refounding Core Team gathering September 14, 1999