

BETHANY MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER

**“There is need of
only one thing.”**
(Luke 10:42)

**“Let them seek first of all
the reign of God.”**
(Rule for Hermitages)

FALL, 2001

Dear Friends of Bethany Ministries,

While visiting Arizona in early September we heard a tribal elder of the Havasupai nation explain one of their rituals. The umbilical cord and all that came with a child at birth was saved until that child's first birthday. Since it was dried out by then, it was made into a fine powder and mixed with red dirt from a special layer of rock in the Grand Canyon. This mixture was smeared over the child's entire body as it was recognized as a member of the nation with these words – “You are the Grand Canyon”. They also used the powder made from these red rocks as sun screen. This is why they were called *Red Men* when the Europeans first saw them.

Francis and Clare would have connected with this oneness with the earth. As a matter of fact, their spirituality was the topic of a presentation we did in Michigan in June. It was entitled Sacred Creation. Using the “Canticle of Brother Sun” as our outline we appeared as Francis and Clare and reflected through story and song how they found sources of their spirituality in creation. The occasion was the dedication of the Pierce Cedar Creek Institute (an environmental education center for adults). Francis and Clare's conviction of God's great love and concern for all of creation, including themselves, empowered them to live true “Gospel” poverty.

Francis of Assisi used to say that he was married to “Lady Poverty”. She was for him an image of Christ, who made himself poor to make us rich. Clare of Assisi fought for “The Privilege of Poverty” until she wore the Pope down and received it on her deathbed. By this “Privilege” she meant that she chose to depend entirely on God, rather than on human security. For both Francis and Clare, Gospel Poverty led to a life of joy and praise. The Praises of God, a prayer Francis composed, says: “*You [God] are beauty, You are security... You are justice, You are moderation, You are all our riches, You are enough for us*”.

The spirit of that prayer is one of the sources for the life of Bethany Ministries. We were gathered as a community one Fall and were discussing the deficit for that fiscal year. Some of us were feeling down about it. Then *Barbara [Chepaitis] and Tom [Fr. Tom Berardi]* suggested that Bethany Ministries ‘pray the budget’ and not to be afraid to allow the finances to take on a prayerful and spiritual aspect. We had engaged in many forms of prayer over the years, but “praying the budget” was a new one. As we look back at the story of Bethany Ministries, we see how many times we have had to “pray the budget” to discover what Francis and Clare knew: that God is *enough* and poverty leads to praise when it is placed in God's hands. Here is the story of one of those times.

Patricia Voss, one of the ministers of prayer for Bethany Ministries, had requested that I (Peter) visit her mother Grace who was in the hospital. In July, 2000 I found myself in New Jersey for a meeting and God's Spirit within me simply said, “Do it now!” Her two grandsons were there as I prayed with Grace, anointed her and played the violin. She insisted that I go around the ward to play for the other patients as well. It was a joy filled time in the midst of an illness which would end in her death on August 1, 2000. In November, 2000, shortly after the last Newsletter went out, we received a donation of \$4,000 from her estate, which made up for a larger than usual deficit for the Fall.

Gospel poverty not only calls us to trust in God's providence for the material needs of Bethany Ministries, it includes the poverty of change, living in the tension between the old and the new. Just when we think we can explain what Bethany Ministries is and how it functions, God gives new growth – and things CHANGE. At its last meeting the members of the “Refounding Core Team” decided to merge the Team itself and the “Associates” into the “Bethany Ministries Community” and to establish a separate Board of Directors. The name and separation of functions will better match the present existing reality. It makes all involved with Bethany Ministries truly what the introduction to our Mission Statement says -- “a Web of relationships held together by mutual commitment to each other as peers”. In July of this year Donna Joy Schmid (a United Methodist minister) moved to Middleburgh and became a part of the Bethany Ministries Community and Anna moved from part time to full time on the Bethany Ministries Mission & Retreat Team.

On September 11th the words of that Havasupai ritual echoed in me (Anna) as a native New Yorker in this way “I am the *Granite Canyon*”. The attack on New York City was a personal experience for me as it was for Peter when his Franciscan brother, Fr. Mychal Judge, gave his life. Since that day we join the world community in experiencing a deep poverty, grief, powerlessness and at the same time a new sense of connectedness. It has become personal for the world.

We thank all of you who are a part of Bethany Ministries for your prayerful support and for being one of the channels through which God provides for Bethany Ministries' financial needs. We continue to depend on your generosity and to be nourished by your prayer. May the One whom Clare knew to be “*enough*” bless each of you with the “Privilege of Poverty”: May the One whom Francis called “*security*” and “*all our riches*” bless you with peace and hope in difficult times and joyful gratitude in times of abundance.

Peace and Good,
Peter Chepaitis, OFM and Anna Tantsits, IHM

Howard and Cheri Needham, have been supporters of Bethany Ministries since its beginnings. The following is part of a letter that Howard wrote a few days after the events of September 11th, 2001.

Dear Friends of Bethany Ministries,

In the wake of the devastation that took place this week, I've been troubled by the mainstream reaction in our country that the way to end these acts is through retaliation and military force, because these seem quite ineffective as the means of achieving a solution. But what saddens me almost as much as the loss and pain we are now suffering is the conspicuous absence of a question that I think should be occurring to us here, a question a courageous young woman asked Peter Jennings in the wake of the disaster: "*Just what exactly is it that we in the United States are doing that is fueling the kind of hatred that drove these terrorists to commit the acts of destruction and murder we witnessed on September 11th?*" Why aren't more people asking this question? Could it be that the sheer magnitude of evil of this act makes us unwilling to look for its roots?

I believe that in the final analysis any real hope for peace in our world lies not with weapons, or retaliatory strikes, or security measures. It resides in the fundamental truth that behind our differences we are all human beings, and are therefore the same creature as the terrorist. The world is no longer big enough to afford the luxury of "us" and "them". We are, for better or worse, all in the same ship now, and to the extent we do not realize this, we sail in a ship of fools.

Therefore, it is time to ask the question that young woman asked, and to insist on arriving at a real answer, and to address the grievances of those who have been angered. This is possible. As human beings we all began at the same headwaters; we all are born, love, and suffer, live and die in much the same way, and are therefore innately capable of understanding each other if we have the will to do so. It's time to travel to the headwaters of that river of common human understanding, and to begin to solve our problems from the premise that the human race can no longer afford to accept hunger and oppression as the circumstance of a single human being. Only from this point, from a point at very core of our existence as human beings can we make those changes that will result in world peace. Trying to stop terrorism with bombs, at a security gate, or at the bulkhead of an aircraft is like trying to stop the Mississippi at the point where it flows into the Gulf of Mexico. It simply cannot succeed.

Howard Needham
Prescott, Arizona

DONATIONS ARE WELCOME

In his **Testament**, St. Francis writes: "*I firmly wish that all my brothers give themselves to honest work.....
.....and when we are not paid for our work, let us have recourse to the table of the Lord, seeking alms from door to door.*"

Bethany Ministries is supported by the work of its members. This income, however, is not enough to sustain all of its ministries. Bethany Ministries is not financially subsidized by the Franciscan Order, the Albany Diocese or any parish. Therefore, we must "*seek alms from door to door*" and ask for donations in order to continue the ministries of *Prayer, Proclamation and Hospitality* while maintaining a preferential option for the poor and a contemplative attitude of prayer.

DONATIONS ARE TAX DEDUCTIBLE IF THEY ARE MADE PAYABLE TO **BETHANY MINISTRIES**.

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