

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)

DECEMBER, 2003

Dear Friends,

Have you ever felt that you could not do or be everything that your heart cried out for? Have you ever discerned that both secular and religious structures got in the way of this desire as much as helped to make it real? That feeling and that vision were among the reasons Bethany Ministries came to be in 1995. I felt it, and I was not alone. Soon we found many others that shared that ache and that vision.

At our meeting in May, we responded to the question, “*What are you being asked to let go of at this time?*” As we shared our experiences and our faith, I remembered something that happened to me while visiting a sick person during a Parish Mission.

*She was Italian and was unable to cook and care for others the way she had done all of her life. She kept saying, “O Di, O Di, I canna do anything any more.” I could only play a song on my violin, which gave her a moment of peace. It was not until I had left the house that a response to her situation came into my mind. I could almost hear the words, “**I can’t do everything I want to do, but I can do everything God wants me to do!**”*

I recently heard the same message in a song by Ken Medema, a wonderful singer and storyteller who is blind, “*There’s no way in this world that I can be [do] everything that love means for me to be [do]. But as long as morning breaks, another day, Lord, I’m yours, I’ll follow, lead the way.*”

The truth of that sentence and that song keeps coming to me this year. In 2003, **Sr. Anna Tantsits** and

I, as the *Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries*, have led 9 Parish Missions (5 or 6 days), 4 week long retreats (mostly for religious sisters), and 7 shorter retreats, two of them for ecumenical groups. We have been able to reach out to the poor, including three parishes on a Choctaw Reservation in Mississippi. We have modeled collaborative ministry of women and men, with clergy and lay persons. Yet we are frequently not paid enough for our work to support the two of us in this ministry and often come up against our own limits of energy and time.

One of the things that we have wanted to do this Fall was to get a newsletter together, or even a meeting of the Bethany Ministries community, but neither was possible until December. We shared at our May gathering that “community” for us is an “open weave.” We struggle to find ways of connecting by phone and e-mail, and look for times to share prayer and food and time. We are a “community of households” which is still discovering what it is called to become. We live in the tensions that come from trying to be this new kind of community that is more like a “virtual” web of relationships. Yet we are full of hope, even in a world that uses fear as a weapon to limit freedom and justify war. **We can’t be everything we want to be, but we can be everything God wants us to be.** May the God of hope bless you in this new year with a hopeful vision and the courage to follow it.

Peace and Good,
Friar Peter Chepaitis, ofm

PS – Peter Bombard has been taking care of our website www.midtel.net/~bethmin and updating it from time to time. The preaching schedule of the Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries has been put on it, as well as past newsletters and a few reflections. More will follow in the future. If you wish to be notified when the website is updated, please send an email to bethmin@midtel.net

The Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries (Fr. Peter & Sr.

Anna)

is supported by the work we do. What we bring in from the missions and retreats we do is not enough to pay all our bills **and** send support for the retired friars and sisters of our religious communities that count on us. This past June we faced a shortfall, which caused us to make our needs known. Thanks to the donations through which so many of you collaborate with us in this ministry, we began our new fiscal year at the beginning of July with a surplus of \$15.68. We continually pray for you and your intentions whenever we gather. We are deeply grateful for your support and for your collaboration in the ministries of prayer, hospitality and proclamation.

*****Bethany Ministries has a **NEW MAILING ADDRESS – PO BOX 432*******
(Peter has not moved --a larger post office box became available)

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Barbara Chepaitis and Steve Sawicki have built a new home, and, though the process was hard work, they are thrilled to have completed a house that's beautiful and environmentally friendly. Barbara had a new book published, *Something Unpredictable*, and another will be born in 2004, *A Lunatic Fear*. She is stilling looking for someone to produce one of her screenplays. Steve moved into the area from Connecticut, where he was administering a very successful program that reached out to the mentally ill and chemically dependant. He and Peter had a meeting with Bishop Hubbard to investigate the possibility of an endorsement so grants could be sought to provide homes and support for these poorest among us in the Albany area.

Kim and Reggie Harris were able to co-lead a Parish Mission in Burlington, NJ this past Lent, and will be working with Peter and Anna in 2004 at a parish of 5,000 families with 1,300 young people in religious education in Medford, NJ. They continue their wonderful and exhausting ministry of music and storytelling. Reggie's mother went home to God this past Fall and he and Kim grieve her loss. They are grateful for many prayers and support from their friends and family.

Jackie Jefferson, the newest member of our circle of households, is always pushing the limits of what she can do as a single mother and as a woman administering and caring for a rural Catholic parish which shares a Priest with a neighboring parish. She prays for the Wisdom to discern what God is calling her to do and be, trusting that if *God* calls, God has always and will continue to provide what is needed for her response.

Jerry Marten struggles with not being able to think and remember the way he used to, yet believes that "It's all in the way you handle what you've been given." He has been appointed as one of the "ministers of prayer" for Bethany Ministries, along with Bonnie Martin, Mary Piccione and Pat Voss.

Kathy Maus has chosen to step out of the circle of Bethany Ministries households as she continues her human and spiritual journey.

Donna Joy Schmid had a wonderful but exhausting summer as program director of the Kingswood United Methodist family camp. During the Spring and Fall she serves a small church in Fultonham, NY and is called in as a substitute teacher about two days a week. During the summer, her father, Don Stone, fell ill and died. She was able to be with him before he went home to God and participated in the funeral. She truly learned once more that she has limits and feelings, yet God provided both strength and transportation when she needed it.

Anna Tantsits had the great joy of traveling to Austria with her sister (Sr. Gerardine Tantsits, SCC) and other members of their family. They even visited the town where her father's family came from. She is still excited about living the dream of having a preaching ministry in the Catholic Church. Sisters from her community have invited her and Peter to do missions in several parishes in the South.

Angela Warbach lives in the tension of family life as a mother with a career. Her husband, **Ron**, was baptized, confirmed and received into communion as a Catholic Christian at the Easter Vigil at St. Joseph's parish in Schoharie, NY, this past April. Angela was his sponsor, Peter presided at the liturgy, Sr. Joan preached at the Mass and Anna helped with the preparation. Ron and Angela now work together with 7th through 9th grade students who are a part of the family faith formation group at their parish. Ron is adjusting to a new job, and they are both trusting in God's guidance and strength.

BETHANY MINISTRIES is a spiritually diverse community of households who seek to live creatively in the tension between solitude and community. The stories of Jesus in relationship with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus of Bethany, as mirrored in the lives of Clare and Francis of Assisi, provide the inspiration for the existence and activities of Bethany Ministries. Prayer, Proclamation and Hospitality are the three principal activities of Bethany Ministries.