

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, 2004

Dear Friends,

♪ **“Sacred the land, sacred the water,
Sacred the sky holy and true.
Sacred all life, sacred each other.
All reflect God who is good.”** ♪

I wish I could sing the words to you. They are part of a contemporary setting of the *Canticle of Brother Sun* that Francis of Assisi composed at the end of his life. They sum up the message that we work to absorb, live and proclaim as a part of Bethany Ministries.

By the end of the year, the Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries will have done nine Parish Missions and three week-long retreats. One of the highlights of the year was an ecumenical “Renewal Celebration”. Anna and I worked with Kim Harris (Reggie was on the West Coast). Seven different Catholic and Protestant Churches in Catskill, NY participated. The diversity of different congregations, races and denominations enriched all of us. We celebrated in word and ritual the sacredness of the earth and of the whole human family, and we considered the week to be part of an answer to the prayer of Jesus, “that all may be one.” During Advent, Anna and I will be traveling to two small parishes in North Carolina with considerable Hispanic membership. Sisters in Anna’s IHM Congregation. pastor both of them. Though neither of us speak Spanish, we can both sing Spanish hymns, and my violin can play in Spanish. We count it a sacred privilege to serve communities that are small and without financial resources.

The Summer was a time for *prayer and reflection* on the sacredness of the earth and all its people. We recognize our need to receive the message of the sacredness of all life even as we seek to live it and pass it on. In June, Holy Name Province sponsored a gathering at Siena College to reflect on a Franciscan approach to Globalization. The message we took from those days is summed up in the words of the song I began with.

Our ministry of *hospitality* continues when Anna and I are not on the road as well as through others in the community. We continue to gather twice a week, once at Donna Joy’s residence to reflect on the Scripture of the coming Sunday, and once on Mill Lane to sit in silent prayer as reflected in the “11th step” of AA, “Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, as we understood God, praying only for knowledge of God’s will for us and the power to carry that out.” Nine guests have been welcomed for 24 overnights at my house and we continue to receive the gift of hospitality from many of you.

Preaching was a challenge during this presidential election year. We heard the spirit of Francis and Clare and the Gospel of Christ call us to live creatively in the tension between honoring God’s call to care for the poor, to protect the environment and to encourage respectful dialogue among people with divergent views and other priorities. It was not easy to speak the truth in love without endorsing any candidate. I found it comforting to realize that we were not electing a savior, only a person who would himself be accountable to the people of this nation and the rest of the world.

In our day, polarization can poison both politics and religion. Francis tamed the wolf and treated the Sultan as a brother, and Clare won the Pope over to her vision of how women could live the Gospel. If we live in the spirit of God’s love and truth in our day, as Francis and Clare did in theirs, the tensions that polarize can be transformed into creative and life giving energy. The words of David Chethlahe Paladin, a Native American artist who died in 1984, echo our hope, nurtured by the spirit of Francis and Clare: “*We can heal the world through the simple act of accepting the validity of people who experience the world differently from the way we do.*”

Peace and Good,
Friar Peter Chepaitis, OFM

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

is not financially subsidized by Holy Name Province (of the Franciscan Order), by the Albany Diocese or any parish. Rather, it is supported by the work we do. However, what we earn doing 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. On June 30th, the end of our last fiscal year, we were in the black, but only by **\$1.68**. The biggest increase in our expenses this year has been our health insurance and the price of gas. Your generosity enables us to continue to minister while maintaining a preferential option for the poor.

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Barbara Chepaitis is actively pursuing the publishing and producing of "Children of the Gods" as a series of novels and a screenplay. The ancient Iroquois story of The Peacemaker is told in parallel with the contemporary struggles of two people to find a lasting peace in our troubled times. She believes that if we can imagine peace, we can make it happen. She sold her house in Schenectady in September and her fourth Science Fiction novel, A Lunatic Fear, came out during the Summer.

Kim and Reggie Harris have just completed recording their latest CD, Let My People Go: A Jewish and African American Celebration of Freedom, with Rabbi Jonathan Kligler, the Rabbi of the Woodstock, NY Jewish congregation. It should be available by late December at their website www.kimandreggie.com . Kim will be receiving her Masters of Divinity from Union Theological Seminary in NYC in May, 2005. Reggie has begun a new season of helping to coach the Middleburgh High School girls varsity basketball team.

Jackie Jefferson, along with the pastor, Father Ray Ethier, Deacon Warren Dorsch and lay members of both parishes, is in the midst of a proposed merger between two parishes in Columbia County, NY. She serves as Pastoral Associate at one of them, Holy Cross in West Taghkanic, NY. Their priority is to carry on the mission of Jesus in their rural county. She has also moved into a new home with her son, Jon.

Donna Joy Schmid, with the help of St. Catherine's, Middleburgh and Bethany Ministries, was able to sponsor two young people from Schoharie County at Kingswood United Methodist family camp where she again served as program director this summer. She is no longer serving as pastor in Fultonham, NY but has applied for the part time chaplaincy at the hospital in Cobleskill, NY. She continues to make jewelry, and you can order it from her by calling her at 518 827-5753.

Anna Tantsits,IHM attended the ground breaking ceremony for the new residence for the senior IHM Sisters. In 2003 the Marian Convent was found to be unsafe for the continued use of the 120 Sisters that live there. So the Sisters have undertaken the challenge of raising the \$28 million it will cost. All were happy at the news that Marywood University will purchase and renovate the older building for 8 million to use for office space, etc. As a fund raiser the IHM Sister musicians and singers have made a CD 'WITH ONE VOICE'. It contains some original songs and can be ordered on line at www.sistersofihm.org.

Angela Warbach has moved into a new house, so each of her girls now has their own room. She continues to reach out to challenged youth of Schoharie County and their families through her job with the county.

Bonnie Martin, Mary Piccione, Pat Voss and Jerry Marten continue to be ministers of prayer for Bethany Ministries. Jerry has moved to Rochester, NY to be closer to his daughters.



[Please keep Kathy Maus, a former member of the Bethany Ministries, in your prayers. Early in February 2004, she suffered a serious stroke and after intensive rehab, she has moved to an assisted living facility in Guilderland, NY.]

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 principle activities of Bethany Ministries.

Bethany Ministries
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