

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, 2005

Dear Friends,

In early November we received this letter:

"Dear Fr. Peter and Sr. Anna,

We are a 6th grade class at Weber Middle school in Port Washington, Long Island. Our religion teacher, Mr. Leo Cimini, has told us about your special ministry and in particular about your singing and the violin.

As a special effort beyond our normal duties at home and above our allowances, we have determined to take up a collection for 2 groups this year: Yours and the St. Anthony Zuni Indian Mission School in New Mexico. Whatever we collect will be split between the 2 groups.

For the month of October, we collected \$39.50. Please understand that this is not an act of charity. It is our way of expressing our love for Jesus and to encourage you to keep up the good work of your Ministries. Perhaps one day you will come to Port Washington so that we may hear you sing and play the violin.

May the Holy Spirit be your inspiration as you walk with Jesus!"

We were stunned by this letter signed by 11 sixth graders. It made us reflect on how God can touch people in ever widening circles when we allow the Spirit to work in us and speak through us. We feel as if we are **partners in ministry** with these young people, as we have been with each other and with so many of you over the years. During the past year we have led Parish Missions in 8 different parishes. Over the next year we will travel to Chateaugay, Canada to do a parish mission in a minority parish [there, that means English speaking]. While there we will also be preaching at St. Francis Xavier Mission on the Mohawk Reservation where Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is buried. We have 6 Missions and 4 sisters' retreats between now and September, 2006. As we minister as *the Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries*, we believe that who we are: a man & a woman; a Catholic priest & sister, speaks as clearly about God's love and truth as do our words and rituals. One of our most exciting experiences this past summer was to serve as Catholic chaplains for a week at the Chautauqua Institution in Western NY. We engaged in dialogue with Christians, Muslims & Jews on the theme of the week -- "Iraq and Its Neighborhood." We also enjoyed some wonderful performances. We were responsible for 3 Masses over the weekend and 2 each day. We led two "seminars"—one was "Sacred Creation," our dramatic presentation of the spirituality of Francis and Clare, and the other a reflection on "Cursing as Jesus Cursed" [praying the curses in the Psalms the way Jesus prayed them]. Anna was the first woman invited to be a Catholic chaplain at Chautauqua.

Peter collaborates regularly with the Catholic Diocese of Albany, NY when he celebrates Masses in different parishes of the Diocese when there is no priest available. In October, he went to Columbia County, where he grew up. He presided at 5 Masses that weekend. The last one was in Spanish, and he collaborated with a layman who did the reflection. Peter meets regularly with a group of Friars who live singly. Recently they chose him to be the official "convener" of the group. They have come to experience themselves as a "community without walls" and have chosen the name, Emmaus Fraternity. Sometimes community goes beyond living in the same house or region.

As Thomas Moore wrote: "*community is not a literal group of people: it's a posture in the world, a deep-seated value, a defining aspect of your personality. In their founding fervor, the religions [of the world] teach that everyone in the world is community to you.*" (Spirituality & Health, Nov-Dec 2005, p. 10).

Peter, Anna and Donna Joy continue to partner with the local clergy of Middleburgh and Schoharie, as a part of an Ecumenical group that meets once a month. They, together with Kim & Reggie Harris, contributed to the Ecumenical Thanksgiving service for the valley.

Donna Joy also collaborates in the ministry of hospitality, especially at our common meals following our Thursday contemplative prayer meeting at Peter's hermitage. And we collaborate with Donna Joy by participating in the weekly Scripture sharing she hosts at her home.

Whenever we lead a Confirmation retreat, we experience an intergenerational partnership with adolescents. We have done 3 of them for 10 different parishes over the past year. We ask the young men and women to work together to put into one sentence what each of the Beatitudes means for them today. That exercise bore stunning fruit at a retreat for Catholic charismatics in November. Anna read the responses of the previous day's Confirmation retreat to the adult retreatants. The adults were moved to tears, and the teens had become our partners in ministry. The power of God worked through the interaction of generations as much as through our presentations.

Both of us reach out to the people of Schoharie County. We were able to be present with a family that was going through a very difficult court trial. And the people of Schoharie County are very supportive of us. Peter's '96 Taurus died in February and we were sharing Anna's '89 Tempo as our only car. That was a new form of collaboration for us. Then in May, we received a gift of a car, a red '97 Saturn wagon from someone in a neighboring town. It helps greatly that our "new" car gets around 30 MPG.

We are deeply grateful that all of you are partners in our ministry of prayer. We rejoice that so many of you are partners in our ministries of proclamation and hospitality. Your donations enable us to collaborate with each other; to advocate for the oppressed; and to continue to reach out to the poor by going to parishes that would otherwise not be able to fund a mission and welcoming guests who are unable to leave a donation. We are delighted and encouraged that you collaborate with us when we welcome guests, gather to pray and proclaim the Good News.

Partnership is a basic value for Bethany Ministries. We have experienced the power of partnership in many and deep ways. We believe the words of the song "Living Planet" (from the album SPOKEN IN LOVE—Kim & Reggie Harris & Maggie)

♪ "We can change the universe by bein' who we are." ♪

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