

BETHANY MINISTRIES NEWSLETTER

"There is need of only one thing."
(Luke 10:42)

"Let them seek first of all the reign of God."
(Francis of Assisi ~ Rule for Hermitages)

DECEMBER, 2006

Dear Friends,

We began 2006 in Canada, with a Parish Mission for an English speaking Church in Chateaugay, near Montreal and a weekend of Masses at Kanawake, the place where Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha is buried. While we were on the Mohawk reservation, we adapted our dramatic meditation on Francis & Clare ("Sacred Creation") and used it as the homily at a Mass where some of the prayers were in the Mohawk language. It was a fitting beginning for a year that found us regularly sharing the Good News of God's love with people from a wide variety of cultures, religions, languages and races. We ended this year's ministry travels doing an Advent Mission in Buffalo.

Since our '89 Tempo went to car heaven in August, we have been managing to get around by sharing the '97 Saturn we were given two years ago. It is still working well, even though it has 140,000 miles on it. We did four week-long retreats in 2006. The highlight of our summer was doing 3 in a row on the newly developed theme of "A Pilgrimage with Mary: Mystic and Prophet," at Stella Maris Retreat Center in Skaneateles, NY, at the Franciscan Sisters' Retirement Community in Ringwood, NJ, & at the Quellen Spiritual Center in Mendham, NJ [where Anna made her novitiate as a Sister of Christian Charity]. In the course of these retreats, we met sisters and laywomen from Kenya, Malawi, Puerto Rico, The Philippines, Vietnam, Germany, Ireland, Italy and all over the U.S., including Hawaii. They ranged in age from 19 to 97. We sang songs and chants in English, Spanish, French, German, Latin, Hebrew, Swahili and Zulu. But the most amazing gift was to experience that God's Good News transcends every language and culture - and can touch each person who opens their heart just where they need it most.

We have also done 6 Parish Missions/ Renewals/ Retreats [parishes choose different names for the process, which begins at all the weekend Masses, and continues for four mornings and evenings]. The farthest south we traveled this past year was North Beach, MD - at the invitation of the pastor and one of the Sisters from Sr. Anna's IHM community. The farthest north was to the parish in Canada, pastored by a Friar who had ministered for many years in the Holy Land. The year included a youth retreat for Confirmation candidates from Sidney, NY, a weekend for a Methodist School of Spirituality, and a presentation of "Sacred Creation" for an Interfaith Group at the United Church in Roscoe, NY. Peter was a chaplain for an Albany Diocesan Cursillo Weekend and preached in several parishes for the Franciscan Missionary Union. Anna participated in her IHM community's "Chapter" and all the preliminary meetings leading up to it.

Our ministry of prayer includes a gathering for contemplative prayer of a small but diverse group that meets at Peter's when we are not on the road. To allow others to share in the Scripture Prayer Group that Donna Joy leads she often travels to a home in neighboring Cobleskill, NY. Along with her, we have been part of the Prayer House Community - an ecumenical group which maintains a hermitage in the Poconos. Its quarterly meetings are made possible by the hospitality of Tilda Norberg and George McClain. This past October, less than 24 hours after we left their house it burned to the ground because of faulty wiring. The Prayer House Community members are now praying about how to help George and Tilda refurbish the home which provides a place for all of us to meet.

This year we have taken retreat time for ourselves both together and separately. In September we spent a week at the two hermitages at the IHM Spiritual Center in Cresco, PA. We followed the retreat rhythm of the Rule for Hermitages composed by Francis of Assisi, spending most of our time alone, but coming together once a day for prayer and a meal.

The ministry of hospitality continues to be an experience of both giving and receiving. Several guests have spent time (from an hour to a week) at Peter's house. But we have also experienced the gift of hospitality both locally and on our journeys around the country. One of our Ministers of Prayer, Mary Piccione, welcomed us to stay at her house near Roscoe, NY. Even though Mary was in Australia attending her granddaughter's wedding, she blessed us with a restful place to stay. After the Parish Mission in Livingston Manor was over, Bob and Lynne Freedman welcomed us to pray with them in their Synagogue in the same town. (The Rabbi was amazed that we could sing in Hebrew). In the course of this past year, we have been struck by the range of diversity among the people we have met and the places we have visited. We have been deeply moved by the way God can bring people together to listen to the words of truth and love which all religions cherish. God has richly blessed us and those we have met this year with the chance to receive and share the truly divine gifts of *love, mercy and peace*. Please pray with us that our experience of unity and life will be a leaven for unity for many people and communities.

May the God who loves us all inspire and empower you to be a leaven for unity and peace in your own families and communities. Know that you and those you love are always remembered in our prayers.

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