



Dear Friends,

You are in our prayers and will be remembered as we celebrate the Christmas Season and begin a New Year. May you find your own way to live creatively in the tensions that give life spice and meaning. May you be good news to all in your lives. Here is some of the good news we experienced in 2007.

## Everything Must Change

We are very excited about a book which gives us hope that it is possible to believe and to spread Good News, even in a world which is full of fear and often lacking in vision. The book, **Everything Must Change** by Brian McLaren is subtitled "Jesus, Global Crises & a Revolution of Hope". Peter is reading it for a second time as we wind down from the intensity of Advent and Christmas, and finding even more hope and wisdom. A light went on for us as we read about the difference between the *framing stories* of our culture and the ones Jesus lived and told. A framing story is one that gives the common life of a society a coherent shape and direction. If the story says that violence is the way to cure violence, then pre-emptive war, capital punishment and revenge are normal. If the story is the one about *The Kingdom of God*, or, as the author translates it, "**God's Sacred Ecosystem**" then non-violence, compassion and equity are normal. As we got deeper into the book, we became very conscious that the mission we have been called to in our work and our lives is to tell that very story of God's kingdom of love, justice & peace. Because we share this vision, we are always reminding people that they are all part of one family with God as our common Parent.

## Justice Issues and the Gospel

During Lent of 2007, our presentations often included references to the scandal of human trafficking, a practice that puts profit ahead of people. This fall New York State joined the federal government and 24 other states that have enacted anti-human trafficking legislation. Do you know where your state stands on this issue? [Our website has reflections & more details about this.] During Advent, though we received much positive response to our preaching, one pastor received a note expressing annoyance with the way we connected the message of the Gospel to the economic and social realities of the world. We received it as a message that let us know the truth was getting through. ~*The Good News still comforts the afflicted and afflicts the comfortable.*

## Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries

Over this past year, we led missions for 12 parishes in three states. One weekend we preached at 13 Masses in 3 parishes. We also led 6 retreats for Secular Franciscan groups, teen-agers, Sisters, lay women & a Filipino community whose ages ranged from 7 to 67. One retreat included a presentation of *Sacred Creation*, our reflection on the lives of Francis & Clare, at the National Shrine of Blessed Kateri Tekakwitha in Fonda, NY. When we were not on the road, Peter covered weekend Masses in various parishes of the Albany Diocese. While covering a parish for two weeks in Woodbourne, NY, in July, Peter got to spend time with some old friends from his days in Callicoon & Warwick. In his spare time he went trout fishing in the Neversink River, which runs right behind the parish house. We also took part in *Table of the Lord*, the Diocesan TV Mass for shut-ins, with Kim & Reggie leading the music.

## Some of Our Partners in Ministry

**Kim & Reggie Harris** continue to spread good news through their concerts and recordings. This year they released another CD, *Get on Board* –Underground Railroad & Civil Rights Freedom Songs, Volume 2. **Barbara Chepaitis** tells

the framing story of the Kingdom of Love, Justice & Peace through novels, workshops and in the classroom. She is still teaching at SUNY Albany and

we are praying that her novel & screenplay, *Children of the Gods*, [based on the Iroquois legend of the Peacemaker] will be published and produced—soon. Many of you share hospitality by welcoming us into your homes during our travels. Since our ministry frequently brings us to Columbia County these days it seems we are always dropping in for a meal with **Marita Casey-Russo** and her husband **Rodney**. It is our home away from home.

## Mary Time in Italy

Our lives are like a violin string. They are lived in the context of the framing story of Bethany Ministries –the stories of Martha, Mary & Lazarus of Bethany. A violin string needs to be in tension in order to make a sound, but it will not play the right note unless it is under just the right amount of tension. The tension needs frequent adjusting or tuning. Like that string, we are always in tension, but sometimes it gets too tight when, like Martha, we are running around doing things. Then it needs to be loosened to give Mary of Bethany a place in our lives. We found some "Mary time" this Fall. With a gift from the sale of her parents' home, we were able to celebrate Anna's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of entering the Convent by taking a trip to Rome & Assisi to reflect on the stories that give us life and hope. The Camaldolese monks gave us a place to stay at their Monastery near the Coliseum while we were in Rome and we visited the Irish Franciscans at Sant'Isidoro where Anna had been on Sabbatical in 1996. We prayed evening prayer in Italian with the Sant'Egidio Community, a group of lay men and women who gather each night for prayer, and reach out to the poor of Rome and the world. In Assisi, we met up with a pilgrimage group from St. Francis Springs in North Carolina and together with them visited the places where Francis & Clare walked. We even went to Gubbio, where Francis tamed the wolf and gave the world a priceless story of non-violent resistance to evil.

## Mary Time at Home

When not on the road we are able to have more time for prayer and take time for retreat ourselves. Regularly we meet with a few people in the area for contemplative prayer. **Stasia Hagan** joins the Thursday evening *prayer & pot luck* gatherings at Peter's house, usually bringing the dessert as well as being a resident wisdom figure. **Darlene Rinaldo** has become a part of our Thursday centering prayer group and sometimes hosts the meeting at her home. She is a social worker who coordinates mental health case management services in both Schoharie and Greene Counties. **Donna Joy Schmid** is also a regular member of this prayer group. She spreads the joy of the Good News through her substitute teaching and her ministry to children, adults, & families at the Middleburgh United Methodist Church. In 2008, she will be celebrating Communion & preaching there once a month. We are sometimes joined by others from the area or someone who might be a guest of one of the regulars. **Angela Warbach** hosted the Bethany Ministries Community for one of our days of reflection and sharing. She continues to spread good news through her work with families and youth and her participation in St. Joseph's Parish in Schoharie, NY. **Heloise Frame** who lives on a farm near Oneonta, NY, has agreed to become one of the ministers of prayer for Bethany Ministries. She joins **Pat Voss**, **Mary Piccione**, and **Bonnie Martin** in praying for our needs and yours. Heloise has supported Bethany Ministries since its beginnings.

## Strengthening Connections

Anna spent a week in July in Baltimore with the Oblates of Providence (the 1<sup>st</sup> Catholic religious community of women of colour) and members of all 3 IHM Congregations reflecting on

their common roots and history. One of the founding members of the Oblates, Theresa Maxis, went on to co-found the IHM Sisters.

Anna also attended the annual IHM Sisters Assembly in Scranton, PA.

Peter met regularly to share faith and prayer with his "Emmaus Fraternity", made up of Friars who live singly. He also traveled to Siena for a "Chapter of Mats" to reflect with his brothers on the vision of how the Friars were being called to live the Gospel in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Something New on the Website**

Our website was renewed because of **Bob & Jean Brew** (Jean is Peter's grade/high school classmate from St. Mary's in Hudson). They not only found a new webmaster, **M-J Adelman**, but they cover the cost of keeping it current. Our web address continues to be [www.midtel.net/~bethmin](http://www.midtel.net/~bethmin). The 'Reflections' page includes the text of some of our presentations and homilies. Our newsletters also have a page, providing a snapshot of our history. On the 'Schedule' page you can find when and where we will be for missions, retreats and even weekend Masses. We invite you to visit it and come to events near you. We are attempting to compile an accurate email list so we can communicate between newsletters. E-mail us at [bethmin@midtel.net](mailto:bethmin@midtel.net) if you would like to be on it. This information will not be shared with anyone else.

### **God's Providential Care**

We are so grateful for your continued support of us in so many ways. We consider you collaborators in our ministry. You make it possible for us to offer hospitality to those who cannot

afford to leave a donation when they spend some retreat time with us in the guest room at Middleburgh. Because of your financial support we can meet our own living expenses and still offer missions and retreats to groups and parishes who cannot afford to cover the entire cost. We are especially grateful to you because we know that for you, as well as for us, everything seems to cost more these days, especially travel expenses. In April, 2007, after 8 months of sharing the '97 Saturn, we were blessed with a second car. It is a 1999 Oldsmobile Cutlass. It was a gift from the Friars at St. Anthony's, Friary in Butler, NJ, and it has become our primary ministry vehicle. We call it the "Teal Oldsmobile." It is amazing to us that every year, since 1995, God has provided us with what we need. We have never had a surplus, but we have always had enough. When our fiscal year ended on June 30, 2007, we were \$1.56 in the black. You are the ones that help us be able to keep tuning the tension between work & rest and ministry & prayer so we can continue to sing a song of Good News by our lives and our work.

May the God of Love & Truth bless your life with Peace & Joy,

**Friar Peter S. Chepaitis, OFM & Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM**

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**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.

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