



Dear Friends,

□ O poverty, source of riches, Jesus, grant to us one heart with the lowly.

O pobreza! Fuente de riqueza; Señor síembra nos alma de pobre! □

We often sing that chant from the Taizé Community when we lead retreats. We sing it in both Spanish and English, and even sometimes in French. It is part of our wrestling with the first Beatitude: *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, theirs is the Kingdom of God!"* We have struggled with this verse for many years. As we have prayed over this Scripture and our experience, we have come to understand that when you *know* your *deepest need*, you are truly *connected with God, others and all of creation*. And the more we are connected with our sisters and brothers in the human family and in the rest of creation, the closer we are to God in the Body of Christ.

The Return of a "Little Brother"

Sometimes we are barely aware of how our needs and our choices forge connections which endure. When Peter was a student at Siena College in 1964, he tutored a 13 year old named **Bill Greene** in English. He ended up becoming his *"big brother"*, in the big brother program which was just starting in Albany. After Peter graduated and became a Friar, they lost touch, but they connected again in 2002. At that time Bill was driving a truck cross country with his wife **Karen** and their young son, **Billy**.

In 2008 they fell on hard times and were not able to work. They lost their truck and were without food or a place to live. The food pantry here in Middleburgh got them through several weeks, and later we helped them contact a group that advocates for veterans. After a while their extended family could no longer provide a place for them to stay. Just when they needed it they were able to acquire and move into a 22' travel trailer, which they told us was certainly an answer to prayer. In November we helped them make a connection with **Rick Lesser**, a long time supporter of Bethany Ministries, who invited them to stay on his property in Ravena, NY. It's close enough to the VA hospital for Bill to make his appointments there.

On Bill's birthday we visited the Greenes in their trailer and as we sat and shared a cup of coffee with them we were moved to tears by a story they told us. In the midst of their own need, they invited another homeless vet who only had a tent to sleep in on a cold night, to sleep in their travel trailer. Their 14 year old son, Billy gave up his bed and slept on the floor that night.

As we do what we can to help Bill & Karen & Billy, we are experiencing what the kingdom of God can be. The reign of God is more like a **'kindom'**, a state of being kin: connected with others in the Body of Christ, with our own real needs, with God and with the earth itself. We are seeing more clearly that true *Gospel* poverty is a state of awareness of our need for connection. It's like the 1st step in every 12 step recovery program, *"Admitted that we were powerless.."*

[more about this on the **reflection page** of www.midtel.net/~bethmin

under "What is the Kingdom of God? - the story of a little brother"]

Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries

During 2008, we led four Parish Missions. We began in January with a huge parish in Altamonte Springs, FL where Sr. Mary Schoberg, IHM is the Pastoral Associate. We had previously done a Mission in Oxford, MS when she was there a few years ago. During Lent, we moved north to Maryland. It was our second trip to St. Anthony Parish where Sr. Ann Parker, IHM serves. At their request we developed new Mission format based

on the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer. Our next stop was St. Patrick's in Chatham, NJ. We finally returned to the Albany Diocese, where we led a mission week with **Kim Harris** for Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish which had evolved from six parishes to a single parish with three worship sites. We led four retreats from May to October. One was a weekend for the parish of

St. Bonaventure in Allegany, NY, which included an experience of advocacy for a Mexican family – victims of human trafficking.

[more on our website's **reflection page** under "Wait for the Lord"]

The others included a week at Stella Maris in Skaneateles, where we love to go, and two week-long retreats for sisters – one in Derby, NY [near Buffalo] and the other in Ringwood, NJ [our second retreat for the Franciscan Sisters there]. In July we led our very first retreat for priests at the St. Columban Retreat Center in Derby. We were a little anxious about it, but the priests received us and our Gospel message with open hearts and ears. They were from 5 different dioceses, from as far away as Orlando, FL.

Some of the Web of Bethany Ministries

We are happy to report that **Reggie Harris**, who had been suffering from liver disease for 15 years, received a liver transplant in October. He is doing wonderfully with his new liver and even sang a song with his wife Kim at a concert for his benefit on December 28. She looks like a new person as well. They celebrate the new level of connection with each other and "all their relations" that has developed through their need. Their "poverty" has truly become a source of riches.

Members of The Bethany Ministries local network met twice formally in the past year at Peter's hermitage and at Barbara's home in Altamont. The gatherings were in February and July. **Angela Warbach**, a member of this network who lives in Gallupville, is still serving the people of the county as a social worker and is dealing with raising two beautiful teen aged daughters as a single parent.

Our contemplative "prayer & pot luck" gathering has grown and takes place at different homes. In addition to **Darlene Rinaldo**, **Stasia Hagan**, **Noreen Flanagan**, **Donna Joy Schmid**, Peter and Anna we are sometimes joined by a guest/retreatant who

may be present on a Thursday evening. **David Nidey** joins us when he can get free from his work responsibilities.

Peter has been presiding and preaching at the Sunday Mass at St. Joseph's in Schoharie since early November. Anna helped organize the parish's Celebration of First Reconciliation during Advent and did the reflection for the young parishioners. The following week they put together and celebrated a parish Communal Reconciliation Service. Anna, Angela and her daughter **Rhianna** sang with the Christmas choir.

Over the past year, Peter has covered Masses in 16 different parishes on 29 weekends, Holy Week, Christmas and 2 Holy Days. He taped two Masses for *Table of the Lord*, The TV Mass broadcast in Albany every Sunday. Anna was one of the readers. Kim & Reggie Harris led the music and members of the Bethany Ministries network, families from Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in Watervliet and of St. Joseph's Parish in Schoharie made up the congregation. Anna, Donna Joy & Peter participated in the annual Thanksgiving Ecumenical service. Peter was the preacher this year.

We were able to get in a vacation this October because **Jean** and **Bob Brew** shared their Lake George cabin with us. They continue to provide the services of **MJ Adelman** to maintain our website. **Barbara Chepaitis** received a grant from Holy Name Province to work on a documentary on Peacemaking which will connect the Iroquois story of the Peacemaker with contemporary efforts by Franciscans and others to build a peaceful world.

[her version of this on our website's **reflection page** under "The Peacemaker"]

New Board of Directors

This year, at the request of Holy Name Province, we established a Board of Directors for the Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries. **Barbara Chepaitis** & **Friar Richard Mucowski, OFM**. [a member of Peter's Emmaus Fraternity] currently serve along with Peter and Anna.

The Prayer House

Peter & Anna continue to be a part of The Prayer House Community along with Donna Joy. The joyful news for 2008 includes the completion of *Penn Haus II*, the home of **Tilda Norberg** & **George McClain**. It is where most of the Prayer House Community stays when we meet at Dingmans Ferry 4 times a year. The first meeting there was in January, 2008. The original *Penn Haus* had burned to the ground in October, 2007. Peter continues to serve as the president of the Water Cooperative for Highland Acres where both the Prayer House and *Penn Haus II* are located. **Rosie Wells**, a neighbor there, provided us a place to meet & stay during the rebuilding process.

Another joyful event was the wedding of Prayer House board members **Ron Barrett** & **Lyn Reith** [Pastor of St. Luke's United Church of Christ]. **George McClain**, a Methodist minister & **Kevin Brown**, a Pentecostal minister co-presided at the wedding and Anna & Peter did the homily. It was a day of ecumenical joy in Lititz, PA on which there was no division among Christians.

[more on our website's **reflection page** under "An Ecumenical Wedding"]

Ministers of Prayer

We grieve the death of **Pat Voss** who was called home to God in the Spring. Peter helped her sons celebrate her life in a memorial service on May 24th in Binghamton. **Bonnie Martin**, **Mary Piccione**, **Heloise Frame** and **Stasia Hagan** continue to serve as ministers of prayer to pray for our needs and yours, and to give thanks to God for all blessings.

God's Providential Care

When our fiscal year ended on June 30, 2008, we were **\$24.26** in the black. Because of your financial support we can meet our own living expenses and still offer missions & retreats to groups and parishes who cannot afford to cover the entire cost. In Nov. & Dec. we usually have two missions, but with parishes all over in the process of merging, etc. and the financial challenges this past year has brought we didn't have any missions during those months. And, even though at the end of December we are **\$635.50** in the red we know that God's Providence will take care of us.

We have experienced our "poverty," our powerlessness and limitations as a source of riches through our connection with you and many others in the Bethany Ministries "web" since 1995. We are so grateful for your continued support of us in so many ways. You are truly collaborators with us in ministry. You were remembered in our prayers in a special way during the Christmas Season and we will celebrate a Mass for your intentions at the beginning of this New Year. You and your loved ones are always mentioned during our prayer time, especially when the candle is lit. Our connection with you renews our hope for the world and for God's continued blessing on all who have "one heart with the lowly".

May the **Light** of God *dispel* your darkness, and may the **Grace** of God *fill* your emptiness.

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

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[Donations made to **Bethany Ministries** are tax deductible]

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.