



# Bethany Ministries

January 2020 – The Story of 2019

Prayer ~ Proclamation ~ Hospitality

Dear Friends,

♪ *Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy & true.*

*Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good.* ♪



This setting of the Canticle of Brother Sun has been the theme of our life & ministry for all our 25 years as Bethany Ministries. It continues to be the melody, rhythm & harmony of how we have tried to proclaim good news to the poor, liberty to captives, recovery of sight to the blind & freedom to the oppressed [cf. Luke 4:14-22] through our ministries of **prayer, proclamation & hospitality**.

This past year can be roughly divided into 3 four-month periods, with some similarities & some significant differences.

### *Throughout the Year*

Our weekly contemplative prayer group, based on the 11<sup>th</sup> Step of AA, along with our monthly Franciscan Spirituality group continued to meet throughout 2019. On Mon, weather permitting, 7-10 people met Anna & Peter in his living room to share life & faith, including 20 minutes dedicated to a silent “prayer of presence.” On special occasions we celebrate the Eucharist. On one Sun of the month, 12-16 people gather to listen to some input from Anna & Peter, & share from their life experiences & faith for 2 hours or more. These 2 gatherings have become the core & rhythm of our community life.

We continue to meet monthly with the pastoral leaders of the Lutheran, Methodist, Catholic & Reformed Churches in Middleburgh. Those meetings are not only times of planning specific events, they are also times of prayer & faith sharing. We were present at most of the N.E.T. (Neighbors Eating Together) dinners which are held twice a month, during the year. Our ministry of spiritual & practical companionship with several individuals continues as the need arises & time & energy allow. It seemed this year, we visited more people than usual who were close to death, often bringing them Holy Communion as “Viaticum,” [which is Latin for “food for the journey”].

### *January – April*

In Jan. Peter travelled to Scottsdale, AZ to attend a retreat week led by Richard Rohr with Friars from all over the U.S. It was a life changing event in preparation for them to evolve from 6 to 1 OFM province. He left a few days early to visit the parents of someone whose marriage we had witnessed in 2018. A blizzard cancelled his return flight so he had to stay a few extra days, while Anna stayed in Middleburgh & sent him pictures of the snow piling up 2 inches per hour for almost a day.



Grove Street from Anna's apartment

We were called by the Spirit to be part of **George Vlachos'** funeral, a long time friend Peter met when he was at Warwick, NY. While there in Jan. we stayed with the Poor Clare Sisters & also visited Peter's aunt, **Linda Giancarlo**. Feb. found us in Schenectady for the funeral of **Teresa Finley**, [Maeve Smith's mother]. In Mar. it was Hudson, NY for Peter's cousin **Bobby Donahue** & in Apr. it was Saratoga for the funeral of **Lynne O'Rourke** the former Parish Life Director at Our Lady of Fatima, Delanson, NY. She & her husband **Bob** were both part of our Franciscan Spirituality group.

In July 2018, **Joe Cechnicki**, a permanent deacon, was appointed Parish Life Director at Our Lady of Hope, Fort Plain, NY. We began traveling there almost every weekend from Feb 9/10, to the Triduum & Easter to celebrate their 3 weekend Masses with them. Between our trips to Fort Plain, we covered Masses at St. Mary's in Oneonta, NY, Holy Cross in Morris, NY & O L of Fatima, Delanson. We also enjoyed visiting Union College for the Campus Ministry Mass & did a mini-retreat in the parishes at Herkimer, NY & Newport, NY by preaching at all the weekend Masses there.

Our ecumenical outreach during these 4 months included a Prayer House Community meeting in PA in Mar, & participation in the Good Friday service at the Schoharie Reformed Church.

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### *May – August*

Assisted by Anna, Peter presided at the weekday & 5 weekend Masses, at Our Lady of the Valley, Middleburgh from Apr 1 – Sept 6, while the pastor was recovering from a broken leg. During this time we also covered several campus ministry liturgies, at SUNY Albany & Union College, & weekend Masses at the 2 parishes in Ravena, NY & Coxsackie, NY. One of the Masses Peter preached at was live streamed for the Albany Diocese. [It can still be viewed if you put in your browser "st patrick's ravena may 26 2019"].

Anna preached for the Peru IHM mission on 2 July weekends, while Peter shared the driving & presided at the Masses. At the request of Bishop Hubbard, we did a week retreat at the Albany Srs of Mercy Motherhouse in Aug. on the theme of "A Pilgrimage with Mary, Mystic & Prophet." We also covered a charismatic Mass at St Paul's in Schenectady. We travelled a 1½ hour drive to Copake Falls 2 weekends, to celebrate Eucharist at Our Lady of Hope in Columbia County. Peter grew up nearby, so we stayed till Mon. so he could visit his favorite trout streams where his dad had taken him fishing.

Ecumenical & interfaith outreach included the H.S Baccalaureate service in Middleburgh; the summer Prayer House meeting, the local Summer Ecumenical Service [Kim & Reggie Harris led the music & preached a powerful message] & standing at the County Peace Vigil on some Saturdays. Besides daily prayer in solitude & with others, we went to Mt. Irenaeus, near St Bonaventure U in Western NY for a Contemplative Retreat. Anna traveled to Scranton for a retreat with her IHM Sisters in June & also attended IHM Days there in July. Peter continues to engage with his Emmaus faith sharing fraternity, usually at Mt St Vincent College in the Bronx. Early in June Anna joined the Friars of that "fraternity without walls" for the retirement celebration for **David Bossman**, OFM, PhD at Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ.

Our ministry of hospitality resumed in a new way when our friends **Terry & Adrienne** visited from the Bronx at the end of Aug. Terry slept at Peter's & his fiancée slept in Anna's apt. They visited again in Nov to attend a traditional Mohawk Thanksgiving dinner followed by a benefit concert given by **Bethany & Peter Yarrow**, to aid the recent return of the Mohawks to Schoharie County.

These months included 4 funerals, 2 requested by local funeral directors & 1 for our longtime friend **Tom Snowdon**. The last was for **David Chancey** whom Peter visited in the hospital where he prayed with his partner **Doug Guevara** & their 2 sons **Matt & Ben**.

On July 21, we attended **Fr. Peter Madori's** 50<sup>th</sup> ordination anniversary. Peter has known Fr. Madori since the 1980's & we did 2 parish missions in his parish in Wurtsboro, NY, where Anna spent many summers at her Aunt Mary Winkler's home. Afterwards we visited **Joe Inghrim** in a Sullivan County nursing home. He & his wife **Mary** led Marriage Encounters with Peter & have become good friends of ours. Joe also worked with Anna's Uncle Charlie.

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### *September – December ~ "The Gift of a Stroke"*



Cabin at Bolton Landing, NY

On Sept 6<sup>th</sup>, Peter's birthday, our life changed dramatically. After going out to dinner with Anna & going to bed early because he was scheduled to do a funeral at 9 the next day, he woke up around 11 pm & could not feel his left side. We were lovingly supported by the other two residents of the 4 apts in our building. **Jan** [a retired nurse] on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor, advised Anna to call 911 immediately. Anna rode in the ambulance to Ellis Hospital, 45 minutes away. **Megan**, who lives next to Anna on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, drove to the hospital around 1:00am & took Anna home around 5:30am.

Peter never lost his speech & was able to walk to the front door. It was a stroke, but a small one. He was released on Monday, after only 3 nights in the hospital. With the approval of his primary care provider, we spent a week of rest in a cabin in Bolton Landing near Lake George where we were already planning on vacationing. We're grateful to our friends, **Bob & Jean Brew** [who own the cabin] for welcoming us there with a hot meal & food in the fridge.

After we got home there were 6 weeks of Physical Therapy twice a week & many medical appointments. We had tremendous support from our Franciscan Spirituality group, whose members drove us places, brought food, & prayed for & with us. The PT was effective in bringing Peter closer to normal functioning, returning him to a limited ability to play the violin. We were warned that he would experience fatigue & times of depression for 6 months to a year by his medical advisors as well as **Randy**, his Physical Therapist [who had himself suffered a stroke a few years ago]. While Peter was unable to do *public* Masses until Christmas Day [in Middleburgh], we were able to continue to meet on Mon with our prayer group & with our Franciscan Spirituality group in Oct, Nov & early Jan. We were even able to continue our ecumenical & interfaith outreach. We led the sharing at the Thanksgiving Eve service in Middleburgh. Peter began by reflecting on the gift of the stroke that turned both our lives upside down.

*"I give thanks for the community that has supported us. Today, after 3 months, I am beginning to realize that the stroke itself is a gift, a gift that has led to spiritual growth, deeper ability to receive love & care, & more strength in my body. I've even lost 20lbs so far. It has led to more balance in my life, more reality in my thinking about my gifts & limits & more depth in my prayer. I'm closer to living in the present moment than I've ever been, practicing what I've been preaching for years. I am almost ready to "forgive what is", to accept new limitations, & sing with St. Francis: 'All praise be yours, my Lord, through those who endure sickness & trial.'"*

[for more details on stroke story see 'Resources/Reflections' page on our website]

In early Dec, we were once more able to participate in "**Miracle on Main St**" by doing a reflection in the library & visiting 3 businesses to play & sing Christmas Carols, always ending with the verse we wrote in 2011, after Hurricane Irene, "O Little Town of Middleburgh."

The last 4 months of 2019 were full of grace & grief. We had lunch with **Ed August** the day after Thanksgiving. We had visited him in Sept, 2 weeks after Peter's stroke, to anoint him, absolve him & give him what we thought was his last Communion. After our visit, he rallied, was able to go to rehab & return home. He hosted us again, with his family & friends on Christmas Eve. We shared prayer, faith & Communion with all gathered. On Dec 10 we visited **Stasia Hagan** in Cobleskill hospital. We blessed her with the Sacraments of Anointing, Reconciliation & Communion. This time the healing the Lord gave her was to pass from this world to the next on Dec 28 – with her daughter, **Katie** & granddaughter, **Natalie** by her side at her home, in her sleep. We celebrated her funeral at O L of the Valley on Jan 2 with a large crowd of family, friends & parishioners.



**Christmas Presentation Puppets**

### *Family, – Religious Community, – Health*



**Sean & Sophia**

Anna travels to Scranton several times a year to visit her close friends in the IHM's as well as to connect with her "Mission Group." Sometimes it's through "Zoom" on the computer. She also visits her sister, **Sr Gerardine**, a Sister of Christian Charity who has been working at a Women's Center in Passaic, NJ. Peter connects with his OFM congregation through regional meetings, the Emmaus faith sharing fraternity & visits to Siena. Both of us spent the major holidays with Peter's family in Hudson in 2019. Peter's sister **Marita** & her husband **Rod** became grandparents twice. **Sean & Katie Casey**, gave birth to **Sophia** in Jan. & **Margaret & Jackie Sprinkle** gave birth to **Penelope Rose** in Dec. The first of their generation to do so - Sean & Katie hosted Thanksgiving dinner this year.



**Penelope & Jackie**

Besides his birthday stroke, Peter has been struggling with tingling & numbness in his wrists since August 2019. He wants to avoid surgery for carpal tunnel, so he is being treated with Active Release Therapy massage by a local chiropractor, & recently by also receiving Acupuncture. Both helped but he will have surgery on both wrists on March 12 & May 12, 2020.

### *God's Providential Care*

One of the gifts of this past year has been the growth of the network of relationships that have supported us & our ministry. That support has included generous financial donations, which have enabled us to meet our regular expenses & take care of increased medical expenses, especially those not covered by insurance. A monthly donation of \$300 from a bequest ends this Feb & we have been able to bring in very little through stipends for ministry since Peter's stroke. We thank you for your continuing donations and prayers - they are needed more than ever this coming year. Our 2005 Vibe, a gift from the Friars, may need replacing soon.

Our ministry of prayer & presence to the people God sends us is growing. We believe, as does Pope Francis, that living the values expressed in the life and prayer of St. Francis & St. Clare contributes to transforming the world, from the inside out, one person & group at a time.

We pray that you & your network of family & friends will be able to sing with your lives,

**Sacred the land, sacred the water, sacred the sky, holy & true.**

**Sacred all life, sacred each other, all reflect God who is good.**

May you always experience the love of God & always reflect the sacredness of creation, all life & each other.

*Fr. Peter & Sr. Anna*



Some of the Retreat participants at Mercy Sister's Motherhouse in Albany, NY this past August



Program we put together for Stasia's funeral ~ **Let us pray for all our loved ones who died this past year.**

You can find **all** of our **contact information** below.

Our **website** has - our **schedule** / most newsletters [with pictures] / our homilies & talks [on the 'Resources Page'] / other information.

THE **FRANCISCAN MINISTRY OF THE WORD** AT **BETHANY MINISTRIES**  
is how **Friar Peter Chepaitis, OFM** & **Sister Anna Tantsits, IHM** earn their living  
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