

Dear Friends of Bethany Ministries,

This fall, Bethany Ministries is celebrating its seventh year of prayer, proclamation, and hospitality. The journey has been one of great joy, as well as great learning, as we all seek to live in that sometimes great tension between solitude and community.

At our most recent meeting we talked about what brought us to be part of this ministry, and what, in the lives of Francis and Clare, we connected with most strongly.

Donna Joy Schmid and Barbara Chepaitis spoke of their connection with Francis' dying message to those gathered around him:

*"I have done what was mine to do," Francis said.  
"May Christ teach you what is yours."*

As we spoke of the kind of work Bethany Ministries has been called to do over the past seven years, we marveled at the way the act of doing and the act of prayer have become connected in our lives.

There is a saying from the Sufi mystic tradition –

*"trust, and let your doing be prayer."*

This exemplifies what our seven years have been, but, particularly in the last year we've become aware of many ways we can, and do, offer prayer, proclamation, and hospitality. Some of that awareness comes from consolidating our notes from our last meeting, where we list the various activities community and team members have taken part in.

## **The Bethany Ministries Community Mission Statement [revised 2002]**

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 principal ministries of the Bethany Ministries Community.

There are the "official" activities of the Retreat and Mission Team (Peter and Anna). These include parish missions, retreats, speaking engagements, presentations, weddings, baptisms, and funerals, and are easily recognized as "Ministry Functions."

There are the guests that come to stay and pray, or those who call for spiritual direction, all a part of Bethany Ministries Hospitality. Along with that are the many ways we pray with each other and the community – the contemplative 11th step meditation group that meets at Peter's on Thursdays, the Tuesday afternoon scripture sharing at Donna Joy's, the daily prayer, and frequent Celebration of Eucharist, along with the special occasions, such as the celebration of the Transitus (the "passing" or death) of Francis in October.

But our Prayer, Proclamation, and Hospitality mission reaches beyond the confines of official activities, as community members continue to work "in the world," in so many ways that are connected to the Spirit.

- ◇ Kathy's continuing education in Shamanic studies informs us all as to broader practices of spirituality.
- ◇ Donna Joy's work at Kingswood United Methodist Family Camp, allows members of the community to share joyfully in what we might call "campfire spirituality."
- ◇ Barbara participated in a service of healing for victims of sexual abuse, witnessing for us all in our own pain at the horrifying revelations of the past year.

This service, which was led by Bethany Ministries community member Kim Harris through the Interfaith center of St. Rose, gave us all time to pray for wisdom to grow in the leadership of the Church, and healing to occur for those who have suffered from such an egregious breach of trust.

Our official work is easy to see, but over the past seven years, we've learned that we're called to much that we forget is also part of Prayer, Proclamation and Hospitality within our daily lives.

One of the joys and sometimes mysteries of Bethany Ministries is the way we strive to integrate our work of Spirit so thoroughly into daily-ness. Often, we do this so completely that we forget to name what we've

*From Donna Joy Schmid*

*Donna Joy describes herself as a “pastor, spiritual director, retreat leader, teacher, wounded healer...blessed in order to be a blessing!”*

*She moved to Middleburgh in the summer of 2001, after serving in Unadilla, NY as a United Methodist Pastor and would like to say a few words to you.*

**. . . Bethany . . .**

For Jesus it was a place where he found friendship, hospitality, caring and concern, faithful and attentive listeners; honest questioning of his actions; affirmation of his true identity, and the opportunity to raise a friend to new life so that others might believe that God had sent him.

For me Bethany Ministries has offered many of those same gifts.

I came, first as a guest, rather Lazarus-like, seeking healing and spiritual direction to restore my soul so that I could continue my ministry, and I found it here, as Peter guided me through some healing experiences and I joined in prayer and mealtime fellowship with other members of the community.

When it became clear to me that I needed to leave parish ministry to be free to serve God as God was calling me to serve, I was welcomed into the Bethany Ministries Community as one of its “households.”

Here I have found encouragement and prayerful support to seek God’s will for my life, to be true to my own call, and to step out in faith as God leads.

In the process, I have found a number of opportunities for ecumenical and interfaith ministry – places where we can affirm by our diversity of gifts and backgrounds, that there is one God, who loves all of us, and wants to heal and bless and use us to share that love with one another, each using our own unique gifts and talents.

I am grateful for all who support this ministry with their prayers and presence and welcome opportunities to share with you in prayer, proclamation and hospitality.

Your Sister in the Spirit

*Donna Joy*

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done as an important spiritual act.

For instance, though Barbara considers that all her writing is a way to “trust, and let her doing be prayer,” she didn’t name the release of her most recent novel, “These Dreams”, until we reminded her about it. The novel is very much a proclamation of the ways in which we endure and heal from grief, a proclamation of the spirit’s capacity to shine.

Angela Warbach also became aware that her work as a catechist passing on her faith in a focused way to the young parishioners of St. Joseph’s Parish is a way she participates in the ministry of proclamation.

There is Anna’s participation in a women’s group at a local parish, supporting them quietly by her presence.

And there is Peter’s recent work (inspired by information from Anna’s congregation of sisters), to encourage local merchants in carrying Fair Trade coffee, which pays growers using sustainable methods as much as 33 cents per dollar as compared with 8 cents for commercial coffees, and so provides them with a decent living wage ([cf. www.transfairusa.org](http://www.transfairusa.org)).

As we discussed these and other activities, it became clear to us that the integration of doing as prayer is a blessing, but also an anomaly. So often our world asks us to separate ourselves into parts – now I’m working, now I’m praying.

So often we do not recognize the prayer of our doing, but all doing can be prayer - as we tend our gardens, our children and families, as we cook, as we decide what coffee to drink and how best to vote.

Both Francis and Clare knew the importance of learning to see where God is in all our activities because when we are conscious of that Divine presence, then our doing truly becomes prayer.

And here is the wonderful paradox: When our doing becomes prayer, we can receive the blessing Francis wished for those who followed him – that we will find what is ours to do.

We send our thanks and love to all of you who are part of our prayers, and who have supported our “doing” so generously.

We continue to trust in and depend on that generosity, and be nourished by your presence in our lives. May God show you what is yours to do, and send you all you need to do it in joy and in prayer.

Peace and Good,  
Friar Peter Chepaitis, ofm