

Dear Friends,

Have you ever felt that you could not do or be everything that your heart cried out for?

Have you ever discerned that both secular and religious structures got in the way of this desire as much as helped to make it real?

That feeling and that vision were among the reasons Bethany Ministries came to be in 1995. I felt it, and I was not alone. Soon we found many others that shared that ache and that vision.

At our meeting in May, we responded to the question,

"What are you being asked to let go of at this time?"

As we shared our experiences and our faith, I remembered something that happened to me while visiting a sick person during a Parish Mission.

She was Italian and was unable to cook and care for others the way she had done all of her life. She kept saying, "O Di, O Di, I canna do anything any more."

I could only play a song on my violin, which gave her a moment of peace. It was not until I had left the house that a response to her situation came into my mind. I could almost hear the words,

"I can't do everything I want to do, but I can do everything God wants me to do!"

I recently heard the same message in a song by Ken Medema, a wonderful singer and storyteller who is blind,

"There's no way in this world that I can be [do] everything that love means for me to be [do], But as long as morning breaks, another day, Lord, I'm yours, I'll follow, lead the way."

The truth of that sentence and that song keeps coming to me this year.

In 2003, Sr. Anna Tantsits and I, as the Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries, have led 9 Parish Missions (5 or 6 days), 4 week long retreats

(mostly for religious sisters), and 7 shorter retreats, two of them for ecumenical groups.

We have been able to reach out to the poor, including three parishes on a Choctaw Reservation in Mississippi. We have modeled collaborative ministry of women and men, with clergy and lay persons. Yet we are frequently not paid enough for our work to support the two of us in this ministry and often come up against our own limits of energy and time.

One of the things that we have wanted to do this Fall was to get a newsletter together, or even a meeting of the Bethany Ministries community, but neither was possible until December.

We shared at our May gathering that "community" for us is an "open weave." We struggle to find ways of connecting by phone and e-mail, and look for times to share prayer and food and time.

We are a "community of households" which is still discovering what it is called to become. We live in the tensions that come from trying to be this new kind of community that is more like a "virtual" web of relationships. Yet we are full of hope, even in a world that uses fear as a weapon to limit freedom and justify war.

We can't be everything we want to be, but we can be everything God wants us to be. May the God of hope bless you in this new year with a hopeful vision and the courage to follow it.

Peace and Good,
Friar Peter Chepaitis, ofm

PS: Peter Bombard has been taking care of our website www.midtel.net/~bethmin and updating it from time to time. The preaching schedule of the Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries has been put on it, as well as past newsletters and a few reflections. More will follow in the future. If you wish to be notified when the website is updated, please send an email to bethmin@midtel.net

The Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries (Fr. Peter & Sr. Anna) is supported by the work we do. What we bring in from the missions and retreats we do is not enough to pay all our bills and send support for the retired friars and sisters of our religious communities that count on us. This past June we faced a shortfall, which caused us to make our needs known. Thanks to the donations through which so many of you collaborate with us in this ministry, we began our new fiscal year at the beginning of July with a surplus of \$15.68. We continually pray for you and your intentions whenever we gather. We are deeply grateful for your support and for your collaboration in the ministries of prayer, hospitality and proclamation.