

Dear Friends of Bethany Ministries,

This is the story of how Bethany Ministries began.

Beginnings: 1987-1992

In 1987, St. Joseph's Friary, the House of Prayer for Holy Name Province of the Franciscan Order, was closed, but my experience of living there for 10 years kept me dreaming of a way to begin again.

I spent five years as a member of the Campus Ministry team at St. Bonaventure University, where my hunger for deep prayer was fed through Mt. Irenaeus, music ministry and Francis Hall Chapel.

In 1992, I became a member of the Franciscan Ministry of the Word team in East Rutherford, N.J., and began preaching parish missions and retreats to Catholic, Protestant and ecumenical groups.

In January, 1993, I presented a proposal to the communities of the Ministry of the Word which attempted to express and integrate the contemplative aspect of the ministry of preaching.

They did not hear God calling them to adopt my proposal as their own, but they agreed that, in 1995, I could become a self-supporting adjunct member of the Ministry of the Word.

After that, I opened a dialogue with the refounding directorate of Holy Name Province.

The Call: 1993-1995

In 1993, I was able to travel to Israel, Assisi and Taize, as a part of my twenty fifth anniversary of my first vows as a Friar.

While on this jubilee pilgrimage, I had a profound experience of connecting with my Jewish and Christian roots, my Franciscan roots and even my family history, since I got to visit the village in Italy where my mother's family originated.

The sung prayer and ecumenical vision of the Taize community in France confirmed my passion for unity and for liturgy.

The whole experience put flesh and blood into the dream of an ecumenical prayer network, which is becoming real through Bethany Ministries.

Meanwhile, I was being drawn more and more to Schoharie County, near Albany, N.Y. The land itself seemed to call me there, and the people I got to know through friendship and ministry became a part

of the call.

Sr. Joan Curley, C.S.J., Kim and Reggie Harris, Fr. Paul Engel and members of two vibrant country parishes became channels of God's invitation to take a new direction in my life and ministry.

Through them, I discovered the possibility of using a house on 60 acres of land in Gilboa, in the southern part of Schoharie County.

Shaping the Vision:

In 1994, as my dialogue with my Friar community continued, I made a definite proposal to the Provincial Minister and Council in December, 1993.

When I met with Fr. Anthony Carrozzo, the Provincial Minister, on January 12, 1994, he listened creatively to the dream that was inspiring me and helped me begin to make it real.

I was commissioned for a two year period, beginning in September, 1995, "to become involved in an experimental ministry that would emphasize the contemplative dimension of our life."

The group sponsoring and supporting me is the Prayer House Community, an ecumenical prayer community which established a hermitage in Dingman's Ferry, PA in 1990, and which I currently serve as a member of the board of directors.

I continued discussions about where I would live with the couple who owned the house and land in Gilboa and, in August, 1994, the Lord provided a car for my use - a 1977 Chevy Caprice Classic.

In January, 1995, I began a six month sabbatical. I enjoyed a wonderful four month program at the Washington Theological Union.

I spent most of May with the Camaldolese Monks at Big Sur, California, and I was welcomed by the Friars at Mt. Irenaeus for most of June.

God adjusts the Plan: July, 1995 - January, 1996

It was in late June, 1995, that God really took over.

The couple from N.J. who were going to let me use the house and land in Gilboa had to withdraw that offer because of family circumstances.

The dream remained very much alive, but now it had to find new ways of expression.

I ended my formal sabbatical time on Sunday, June

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25 with a wonderful weekend at Siena College, celebrating "Partners in Ministry" with Friars and laity who share a vision of collaborative ministry.

The next day, while travelling with Sr. Anna Tantsits, IHM, I began looking for a place to live in Schoharie County.

On Monday, June 26, Fr. Ken Tunny, the new pastor of St. Catherine's Church in Middleburgh, NY, offered me his room in the parish house until I found a more permanent place (he had decided to live with another priest in a neighboring parish).

In early July, I met with the Prayer House Community for three days and, then, spent a week on retreat with my spiritual director, allowing the Lord to put my emotional and spiritual pieces back together again.

On July 21, 1995, I moved from East Rutherford, N.J. to Middleburgh.

A New Home for God's Dream

On August 22, 1995, I signed a one year lease for a double-wide mobile home in Middleburgh.

It has three bedrooms and two bathrooms and is located on 3.6 acres of land next to the Schoharie creek. It's on a dead end street, Mill Lane, and is one of only five residences on the street.

While my physical place of "Contemplative

Hospitality" has shrunk, God's dream has not.

While I will be able to welcome only one or two guests at a time in my "little portion," there are other members who have begun to connect with the Bethany Ministries "web" who can welcome guests now or will be able to do so in the future.

Kateri Maus has moved into the area from Buffalo, N.Y. and has been living in a mobile home three miles away from Mill Lane since mid-November. She has space for two guests and 16 acres of land to explore.

Sr. Joan Curley, the Parochial Administrator of St. Joseph's Parish in Schoharie, five miles away from Middleburgh, was welcoming guests for prayer before I moved to the county.

Steve and Arlene Shako live on a 200 acre farm about 15 miles from Middleburgh and have welcomed guests from diverse religious traditions to engage in a spiritual search.

Sr. Anna Tantsits, IHM has been on sabbatical and has assisted in the birth of Bethany Ministries in many practical and spiritual ways.

She is looking for a way to be a part of the on site "web" after the summer of 1996.

Peace and Good,
Peter Chepaitis, OFM