



Winter 2010

Prayer ~ Proclamation ~ Hospitality

Dear Friends,

This song by Marty Haugen and the Scripture it's based on (Luke 24:13-49) seem to sum up 2010 for us.

♪ *On the journey to Emmaus with our hearts cold as stone, the one who would save us had left us alone.*

Then a stranger walks with us and to our surprise, he opens our stories and he opens our eyes. ♪

Here are some of the highlights from our year.

A Mass of Spirituals

On Wednesday, March 10, we were invited by Kim Harris to be a part of her journey towards a PhD in Theology and the Arts from Union Theological Seminary in NYC. She had composed the music for a Mass which she called "*Welcome Table: A Mass of Spirituals*" as part of her dissertation. The evening began with Kim demonstrating how she took melodies from the spirituals and used them as settings for texts from the Catholic liturgy.

During Kim's talk, both of us sang with a spectacular Gospel choir under the direction of M. Roger Holland who collaborated with Kim on the music. Then we participated in a Eucharist which incorporated her music in the celebration. Peter presided and sang the priest's parts, Kim was the cantor & the choir led the congregation. Anna & Peter also did a reflection on the scriptures used at the Mass.

An Eagle Named "Mitch"

Early last Summer a steppe eagle was rescued by American troops after it was shot in Afghanistan. They named him "Mitch" and began looking for a home for him, since he could no longer fly. While they were looking, they even gave up some of their rations to feed him. Eventually through the internet they contacted the *Berkshire Bird Paradise* in Rensselaer County east of Troy, NY.

Peter's sister, Barbara, a member of the Advisory Board of Bethany Ministries, had just written a book about this sanctuary entitled *Feathers of Hope*. Working closely with the director of the sanctuary, Pete Dubacher, himself a Viet Nam vet, she began an incredible journey of compassion and courage on behalf of Mitch and those troops who cared for him.

In attempting to bring Mitch here, they had to deal with the USDA, the State Department, the White House and Senator Schumer's office in NY, as well as the Afghan Embassy and other bureaucracies and everyone told them it was an impossible task. Barbara kept saying, "*I think you need to re-think your position.*" As they struggled with the military & governmental bureaucracies so that Mitch could be rescued, what kept them going was their admiration and concern for the young men and women who found in this act of caring a window of hope and compassion. And, against all odds, they succeeded.

Brother Eagle arrived in the States on Fri, Oct 8th, a few days after the Feast of St. Francis, and, after a time in quarantine, came to the Berkshire Bird Paradise on Nov 8th in the midst of the first snow storm of the season. We had the joy of blessing him that day, as Barbara and Pete Dubacher told the story of Mitch and the people who cared about him to the local news media.

We give thanks for this parable of Good News which reveals a vision of how all creation is connected and of how compassion for one of God's creatures is a sign of the sacredness of all life and a blessing for both the one cared for and the ones who cared. For more about this story, check our website or the website of the Berkshire Bird Paradise, www.birdparadise.org.

Ecumenical Ministry

We continue to be a part of the Prayer House Community and of the local clergy group in Middleburgh & Schoharie. The Reformed Congregation in Schoharie, NY asked us to lead Stations of the Cross on Good Friday in their Church. We preached and sang at the Schoharie Presbyterian Church in May & Oct while they were looking for an interim pastor. We were part of the area Ecumenical Thanksgiving service & provided the "special music" at the fund raising dinner for the Capital Region Theological Center at which Bishop Hubbard of Albany was the main speaker. Also, we engage in spiritual direction with people of different spiritual traditions.

Franciscan Ministry of the Word at Bethany Ministries

This past Lent, we journeyed to Lafayette, LA to Mary, Mother of the Church Parish in Cajun country for a Saturday to Thursday parish mission. We also did a weekend mission at Our Lady of Hope parish in Fort Plain, NY, a parish formed by the merging of three parishes, with a theme of "Healing into Hope."

We led two retreats over the summer, one from Sun to Sat at Stella Maris Retreat Center, reflecting on the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer, & another a St. Ann Novena for 9 evenings at Holy Trinity in Binghamton, NY. We also led 6 weekend or day retreats, half of them on the theme of "Mary, Mystic & Prophet." We have openings in our schedule for parish missions and retreats in 2011, and would be happy if you let your pastors or church leaders know about our work. You can check our website or call us for details.

In the Albany Diocese where we live, we have led celebrations both for First Reconciliation and parish Penance services, as well as given a workshop for lectors at the Autumn Diocesan Gathering. Peter has presided and preached at four Masses on TV and we have travelled to 20 parishes over 33 weekends, mostly in the Albany Diocese. Next year we plan to be a part of the Albany Diocesan evangelization initiative called *Amazing God*.

Grieving Family & Friends

In late September we received a call from Karen, Bill Greene's wife, letting us know that he had been diagnosed with stage four cancer of the esophagus, and had been given a year to live. Their journey had taken them to Richmond, VA for the sake of Bill's health. His story was in our 2008 newsletter and can be found on our website.

On Saturday evening, Sept 25th, Bill himself called Peter. He was full of joy that he had been released from the hospital and was home with Karen and his 16 year old son Billy. He was aware that he had been given a year to live and rejoiced that he had that time to help his family get ready. Early the next morning he went home to God while Karen, his wife, was at his bedside. A Friar who is working at a hospital in Richmond, Fr. Ray Selker, was present to pray with Karen and Billy at the funeral home on Oct 6th, before the body was released for cremation.

His remains were brought to the Albany area and we led the celebration of his funeral service on Oct 17th in Voorheesville, NY. Since he was a veteran, he was buried the next day with military honors at the National Cemetery in Saratoga, NY. Through the grace of God and the help of family and friends, what Bill had hoped to do for his family in the coming year is beginning to be done. Young Billy is looking forward to going fishing with Peter next spring, just as his father did 45 years ago.

Besides this funeral, we continue to walk with grieving family, friends and members of local parishes on their journeys. We led funeral services for Lorraine Stanley, the mother of Janet Stanley of the Prayer House Community & for Frank Dominkowitz, husband of Anna's cousin Elaine, who lived next door to her parents. We were able to be present at the funeral of Marie Warnoch, who, with her husband Joe, had hosted us at their home. We also participated in David Huse's funeral Mass & Susan Ball's memorial service. Both were very important to the farming community in Schoharie County and their deaths were unexpected. Please join us in praying for the families of these people who are grieving the loss of their loved ones as they continue their life journeys.

Bethany Ministries - Web of Relationships

Anna & Peter baptized her newest cousin **Jillian** in Bogota, NJ on Oct 16th. Peter's sister, **Marita** & her husband, **Rodney Russo** regularly welcome Peter & Anna to their home when they are ministering near Hudson, NY for simply wonderful meals & overnight accommodations. **Peter** turned 65 in Sept, & now instead of one medical insurance card, he has a deck of cards. He still meets with his "Emmaus Fraternity" of 6 Friars who live singly, & Anna continues to connect with her IHM Sisters through her "mission group." By the end of January both Anna & Peter will have attended their respective chapter meetings, where new leadership was elected both for the IHM Sisters & the Franciscan Friars.

Bob & Jean Brew continue to cover our website maintenance costs. In June we were able to add to their joy by participating in the planning and celebration of their daughter Allison's wedding. Twice over the past year **Kim & Reggie Harris** lent us their 2nd van so Peter could cover Masses while Anna was with her IHM sisters. **Barbara Chepaitis** is writing another book about her adventures with "Eagle Mitch," & continues to seek to publish and produce her novels and her screenplay about the Iroquois Peacemaker Story. **Barbara Saleh White** who sometimes comes for retreat here gave us a valuable new 'toy', a Magellan GPS. It has a female voice so we've named it "Magella." On our many journeys we laugh as she tells us where to go, grateful not to have to juggle maps any more.

On Thurs evenings we continue meeting in one another's homes to share prayer and food. Presently the group consists of **Darleen Rinaldo, David Nidey, Angela Warbach** & us, when we're home. In May, **Donna Joy Schmid** moved to Napa, CA. She's enjoying the warmer weather while making new friends. **Noreen Flanagan** another former member of the Thurs evening group has also moved, but to Long Island. She has joined **Bonnie Martin, Mary Piccione, Heloise Frame & Stasia Hagan** as a special Minister of Prayer for Bethany Ministries. They pray for all of our intentions and yours – especially those you specifically ask us to pray for and for all those things God knows we need, even if we don't.

We may soon need someone to maintain the Bethany Ministries website. If you know anyone who would be willing and able to take it over please let us know. In the meantime, we will try to keep our schedule updated and to post reflections & homilies there. Both of us are now on Facebook, and just beginning to learn how to use it.

God's Providential Care

At the end of our fiscal year this past June, we were \$1.77 in the black. Without your donations and monthly contributions it would not be possible to keep Bethany Ministries going and pay all of our regular bills [including Sr. Anna's stipend sent to the IHMs and Fr Peter's Provincial Support sent to the Friars]. We are so grateful that just this month, we have been promised a matching grant of \$1,000. This will go a long way for us when it's matched.

Beginning in Sept of '09 we have been managing with one car between us, but now it's beginning to require some expensive repairs. Since Bethany Ministries began in 1995, whenever we needed a new vehicle someone has always donated another in good condition with reasonably low mileage. If you know anyone who has a car to donate to Bethany Ministries let us know.

We are deeply grateful for your prayers and your participation in the web of relationships that makes up Bethany Ministries. During this Advent and Christmas Season we have remembered you in a special way whenever we lit a candle to pray.

May the Lord bless you and walk with you as you continue on your life journey into the New Year of 2011.

♪ **On the journey to Emmaus in our stories and feast, With Jesus we claim that the greatest is least:**

And his words burn within us—let none be ignored— Who welcomes the stranger shall welcome the Lord. ♪

Fr. Peter & Sr. Anna