



Homecoming

Bethany Retreat House

Volume 12, Number 1

October 2008

Area Flooding Affects Bethany by Mary Wysock

It may come as little surprise to Chicago-area readers that Bethany Retreat House was one of the many area homes to experience groundwater seepage into the lower level the weekend of September 13-14 when a stationary front and then Hurricane Ike brought three days of relentless rain to the area, causing extensive flooding.

Sr. Joyce was out of town that weekend, but, hearing about the weather through some phone calls, she asked the sisters in her local community to check for water even though Bethany had never been flooded before. What they found was four inches of water “flowing like rivers” throughout the lower level. The PHJC community, along with Herlinda Castro of Ancilla Systems, Inc., and her husband Sergio acted quickly and began to move items out and clean up the water. By the time Sr. Joyce returned home Monday afternoon, the water had been vacuumed out and most of the items moved upstairs to dry ground. What followed was a week of sorting things and moving them to temporary storage so the upper level of the house could be used for ministry.



This is one of many piles of flooded items from the lower level of the retreat house.

All the carpeting and the paneling and drywall in all rooms but the office need to be replaced. The office desks, a couple other pieces of furniture, and several baskets and pillows were lost. Surprisingly, only half a box of bookstore books were damaged.

For the duration of the rebuilding process, the office has been moved upstairs, the chapel room is serving as group space, and the dining room houses a smaller version of the bookstore. While the lower level is being rebuilt, spiritual direction appointments and groups continue here, but there is currently no space to welcome retreat guests until late October.

Although the cleanup and rebuilding continue, Bethany rebounds thanks to the outpouring of help from the PHJC community and many friends and neighbors who have offered their support and words of encouragement. Heartfelt thanks to all the helpers for their hard work (see separate list of volunteers). A special thank you to Herlinda Castro who was a great assistance all that first week, arranging help with the clean-up and storage *See FLOOD, p. 2*

We Laugh with God (and God Laughs with Us) by Dick Poole

I serve a church that has been dealing with some serious financial issues. Although I try to be that “non-anxious presence” with them, more and more I find myself stressed by the budget crunch.

A few days ago I was enjoying my prayer time as I walked my dog, Arwen. I was thinking of the gospel story of Jesus seeking a “deserted place” for prayer after he had heard of the murder of John the Baptist. When Jesus got out of the boat, he stepped right into the midst of a great crowd of hurting people, “and he had compassion for them and cured

their sick” (Matthew 14:14).

“How could he do that?” I thought – expend all that energy with such needy folks. “How could he do that?” I thought – and without thinking came the line “with such little feet!” Now, this is a joke that I must explain, at least to some. That surprise phrase comes from the end of Mel Brooks’ *Blazing Saddles* and is a reference to Douglas Fairbanks, Jr. You’d have to see the movie to experience its humor. But what I find humorous is the way that in the midst of “serious” *See LAUGH, p. 2*

From the Director's Chair

by Joyce Diltz, PHJC



We have wanted to put out a special edition of Homecoming to share some spirituality articles that the combined newsletter does not have space for. I hope you will find these articles encouraging in your faith journey. Many thanks to our guest writers for their reflections.

Little did I know when we began this issue that we would have the flood story to include. The damage here is significant. At the same time, it is much less than many people in Northwest Indiana experienced who lost their homes that fateful weekend of constant rain. That perspective has kept me going through these days of upheaval.

I am so very grateful to my PHJC Sisters Agnes Matthew, Annemarie Kampwerth, Michele Dvorak, Barbara Kuper, and Magdalen Hellman, and to Herlinda and Sergio Castro, whose generous efforts saved the house and its contents from worse damage while I was at a seminar in North Carolina. The resources of Ancilla Systems, Inc., have also been invaluable in getting through this time.

After the flood, it took a week to make room on the upper level so appointments and groups could continue during the rebuilding process. Until we got things into a portable storage unit, at the kitchen table was the only place to sit, and I felt like I was living in a flea market. Portable storage units are a wonderful thing!

We expect by November 1 that the construction will be completed and the office and I will be moved back to the lower level so we can again welcome guests for retreat. I look forward to that time in many ways!

Laugh continued from p. 1
prayer, Mel Brooks comes bursting in. Is it sacrilegious? Is it just some "junk" in the midst of an undisciplined prayer life?

Or is it God coming on the wings of a laugh? Yes, I think so. When I become so burdened with my stress (real or imagined), God has a way of coming into my prayer with a bit of the irreligious. God knows I have a tendency to take myself as well as the church all too seriously. As someone said to me recently, I have a way of focusing on an individual tree (and usually its disease) and missing out on the glory of the forest.

Oscar Wilde, the British playwright of the late 19th century, once said something like, "Truth is too important to be taken seriously." And God is truth – and love and life and church and all the other things that are of ultimate importance. Wilde knew that when we take something seriously, we often wring the life out of it. Humor is a way of putting things in perspec-

tive, namely remembering that we are not God.

God has a way of coming to us in humor and lightening our heaviness. Admit it: don't you laugh a bit when Moses at the burning bush trips all over himself with excuses, and God counters each one? Or how Elijah whines about being the only righteous one left in all of Israel, and God comes in the sheer silence and tells him to get off his rear end and head on to the wilderness of Damascus, and that God, not Elijah, will lift up the 7,000 faithful Israelites! Then there's the story of little, rich Zacchaeus climbing up a tree to see Jesus. And the best one is when God raises Jesus from the grave and "laughs death to scorn"!

May God continue to come to us in our prayer on the wings of laughter. As the younger folk invite us, may we in prayer LOL! (And if you don't know what that means, ask one of them.)

Rev. Dick Poole is a spiritual director and interim pastor of St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Michigan City, Indiana.

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a newsletter of Bethany Retreat House
published occasionally at
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Bethany Retreat House
is a ministry of the
Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ
(Ancilla Domini Sisters, Inc.)
congregation of women religious.

Flood continued from p. 1
and discovering over and over the next thing that had to be done. Her resourcefulness in a time of crisis knows no bounds!

Sr. Joyce and Mary are most grateful to all who offered help and sent contributions. To those who phoned with an offer to help, your offers will be claimed when the reconstruction is done and it's time to move back in to the lower level!

Reflecting on the flood experience, Sr. Joyce said, "We believe good will come of all this as it already has in the hearts and hands that have reached out to us. We look forward to continuing on in the new space and to welcoming retreat guests once again."

Bethany Retreat House is open during renovations. We will again be able to welcome overnight guests by November 1.

BRH Bookshelf



Balancing Work and Prayer in Everyday Life

by Elizabeth Flores

Open the Door: A Journey to the True Self

by Joyce Rupp

Sorin Books, 2008, paperback, 212 pages, \$17.95

Reviewed by Deb Szrom Steppe

Available through the Bethany Retreat House Bookstore

I love working with metaphors in writing, praying, and in just making sense of the world. But in hearing the title, *Open the Door*, I was confused. The image of a door seemed kind of mundane. I didn't get it. It didn't take me long, however (about two pages), to see the richness of Joyce Rupp's use of the metaphor and to accept her invitation for this journey.

In this work, Rupp guides the reader inward. In journeying to our most authentic self, we connect with that part of ourselves where God dwells. In the introduction Rupp writes, "Our purpose for opening the door inward is to help us know and claim who we are so we can more completely join with God in expressing this love in every part of our external world." That is a tall order! The use of metaphor breaks all of that down into manageable pieces.

Rupp guides the reader through six weeks of exercises. For each day there is an essay, a guided visualization, questions for reflection, a prayer, and a verse from Scripture. The seventh day of the week is meant for rest and reflection. I found that the exercises were consistently strong and comprehensive. As the weeks go by the exercises go deeper, allowing the reader to face some profound truths. In addition, parts of ourselves that we might feel are unacceptable may also be found. Joyce Rupp shows great wisdom in directing the reader through it all.

Opening the door to our hearts is a journey that is best taken with a trusted guide. Joyce Rupp remains just such a guide.

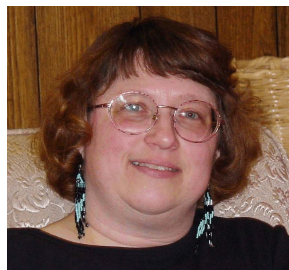
Heartfelt Thanks to All

Who Helped Bethany Survive the Flood

Herlinda & Sergio Castro • PHJC Sisters Annemarie Kampwerth, Michele Dvorak, Barbara Kuper, Magdalen Hellman, Agnes Matthew, Marybeth Martin, Pam Tholkes, Kathleen Quinn, Margaret Anne Hens • Elizabeth Flores • Marianna Pazik R. Louie & Martha Gonzalez • Kathy Zaehring • Bob Meaney Kandice Bishop • Sr. Mary Pat Berger, OSF • Dale Law Mary Wysock • Ancilla Systems, Inc. • Tim Stuart Steel City Home Improvement • Pronto Staffing Services Poor Handmaids of Jesus Christ

My desire has been to be a woman of prayer with a family and job responsibilities. I began asking God in prayer how to realize my desires. God and I began with small amounts of prayer and a short scripture passage.

Five minutes in the morning, at noon, and in the evening. As much as possible I keep the three times of prayer in my day. Family responsibilities sometimes mean I let my prayer schedule go and pray on the run in the car or whatever few moments I can find to connect with God.



Elizabeth Flores

In silent meditation or soft conversation, I ask God to supply the resources to be a woman of prayer. God put the people, places, and things in my path to help me to be a woman of prayer – things like bible study, hymnals, music, books, retreating and continuing education, to name a few.

As God and I continue to commune, the form, time, prayers, and movement of this relationship continue to grow and change. I schedule time like I would schedule an appointment to be with God, being as creative as possible. God has shown me so many creative ways to connect with him.

My car is like a second home and I use some of my commuting time to pray, sharing with God what is on my mind and heart. I have a CD player, cassette player, and a radio with Christian music or inspirational music to bring me into the presence of God.

This process of becoming a woman of prayer did not happen overnight. It has taken God and me some time to find ways to use the small amounts of time to connect and grow in relationship.

Sunday worship and scheduling other times of extra spiritual experiences like a nativity play at Christmas or the Lenten reflections offered during Lent are part of this process.

I retreat to a retreat center as much as my schedule allows. Monthly I schedule a few hours somewhere quiet – maybe my home if everyone is gone or at the local beach or another quiet place.

I invite you to share with God your desire to balance family and prayer and trust he will provide. Blessings on the journey!

Elizabeth Flores is a life-long learner and spiritual director from Griffith, Indiana.



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Fall invites us to reflection.
Consider some retreat time at Bethany
for your own prayerful reflection
for a day away or a weekend or more
to be scheduled for your convenience.
Gift certificates are available.

Call 219-398-5047 for details.

Sitting at Jesus' Feet by Mary Mauer



Cathy Sutkowski reflects in Bethany's meditation garden.

I remind myself when I begin to feel frazzled and less patient with others how often Jesus went away to pray alone, especially in the Gospel of Luke. When I come to Bethany Retreat House I feel I am following in the steps of Jesus who was welcomed into Martha's House in Luke 10:38-42. During my stay I sit at the feet of Jesus and listen attentively.

I began my retreat this year by asking, "Mon Dieu, what can I tell you that you don't already know?" Through the week I heard all that I did not yet know. I leave the silence here where I was able to hear and see the grace of God at work in me and return to ministry knowing how much I am loved by God. I leave with a CD that I found here which every morning and I can sing along

with the praise of the One who loved me into being, has always held me in the palm of his hand, and shows me continually where I need to be led and what I need to do.

Jesus Christ is present to all who come to Bethany Retreat House to be nourished in body, mind, and soul. For everyone who may read this, I invite you to come sit at the feet of Jesus and listen. Indulge yourself in the library and in the bookstore. Rest in him alone – in the garden, the chapel, the sacred space. Listen to the whispering voice in the fountain, trees, and shrubs of Bethany Retreat House.

Mary Mauer coordinates adult religious education at St. Paul's Catholic Church, Valparaiso, Indiana.