

E-Portion ~ April 2009



It has been said on more than one occasion that if you want to know what Episcopalians believe, then come and pray with us. For better or worse, we are not a people who are defined dogmatically. We try to live as we pray; and above all else what we pray is Easter. In this spirit I commend to your reading pages 264-295 of the *Book of Common Prayer*. To “read, mark, learn and inwardly digest” these liturgies is to gain a deeper sense of the good news we proclaim. Better than reading them, of course, is to *participate* in them with this faith community as we move into Holy Week and toward the celebration of Easter. They are “of a piece”—one drama told in five compelling acts. I tell confirmands that to share in this unfolding drama is to gain a deeper appreciation for who we are as a people than attending fifty-two Sundays a year. (And I mean it!)

The story began on Ash Wednesday, as the trumpet sounded to wake us up and call us back to God, the Source of our being. Ash Wednesday is rich with symbolism that reminds us of our mortality and our call to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. It is a call to “take stock” of our lives, especially where we have fallen short of this noble calling. It sets the tone for a season of prayer, fasting, and alms-giving. Since that time we have steadfastly been moving toward Jerusalem and pondering the meaning of the cross.

In Act II of this drama, on Palm/Passion Sunday (which this year will fall on the weekend of April 4-5) we will recall the final days of Jesus’ earthly life. Some may remember the days when only the Liturgy of the Palms was celebrated and perhaps even wish that we didn’t include the Passion Narrative this quickly. (They see it, perhaps correctly, as a concession to modern culture by rushing ahead of the narrative.) That may be so, but it is the liturgy the *Prayerbook* gives us and I have come to see wisdom in it: it is like a preview of the coming week and it gives us an opportunity to experience the entire Passion narrative together before we celebrate Easter and sing “alleluia” once more. So we enter the holy city of Jerusalem with Jesus, who is greeted with shouts of hosanna; only to find those shouts replaced within days by another cry: “crucify him!”

On Thursday Evening we celebrate Maundy Thursday; the adjective comes from a shortened form of the Latin word *mandatum* from which we get the word “mandate” in English. The day is incredibly important to our life together as Christians: as the synoptic gospel writers remember the story, Jesus gathers with his friends in an Upper Room to celebrate Passover, and in so doing institutes the Last Supper. John’s Gospel remembers it a bit differently: Jesus washes his disciples’ feet; which is to say he does the work of a slave, even though he is messiah. And then He gives a new commandment—a new mandate that his friends “love one another.” Some people are nervous about attending this service because they don’t want to have their feet washed. They are in good company: Peter wasn’t sure he wanted to have Jesus wash his feet either. You should know that we don’t force anyone to come forward and on average my guess is that about half of those in attendance do and half do not. What I can tell you is that for those who do it is usually a holy and life-giving experience. But whether or not you come forward, I invite you to come. If you choose to attend the late service at 7:30 p.m. it includes the stripping of the altar, followed by a time of prayer and our Gethsemane watch. (We ask two or three persons at a time to “keep awake” through the night hours until daybreak and Morning Prayer.)

There is a longstanding tradition in Holden to celebrate Good Friday ecumenically with the other congregations in town from noon until 3 p.m. We also offer a service of “Stations of the Cross” at 5 p.m., mindful that this liturgy has Franciscan roots. But the primary liturgy of the day for us as Episcopalians is the one in the *Prayerbook* on pages 276-282. There we face the stark and solemn reality of the cross; there we hear the Passion Narrative from the perspective of the fourth gospel. (On Palm Sunday we rotate among the three synoptic gospel writers, hearing from Mark this year.)

One of the most underutilized liturgies is the short service found on page 283 of the *Prayerbook*. Each year I gather for about ten or fifteen minutes with the Altar Guild on Holy Saturday at 9 a.m. to offer this service before they begin decorating for Easter. It's a reminder that much of our lives is lived "in between" in times of waiting. Good Friday is past but Easter is still hours away. But I think that much of our lives is about Saturday waiting. This year the Altar Guild wants to extend an invitation to any who wish to attend at 9 a.m. to join us for this service.

If you've never attended the Easter Vigil I encourage you to do so this year. It's different from Easter morning, which I also love. It connects us to our roots and to the ancient beauty of early Christian faith. It connects us to the story of salvation history as told in the Old Testament: at creation, in the binding of Isaac, in the crossing of the Red Sea and the promise of a law written on hearts, and salvation for all people, and Ezekiel's valley of dry bones that live again. Each of these old stories prefigures the resurrection. We will celebrate Holy Baptism and renew our own Baptismal vows. It is a beautiful liturgy that I hope you will share in.

Ash Wednesday, Palm/Passion Sunday, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and the Easter Vigil.: together this five-part drama tells the story of Christ's death and resurrection and the story of the new life that we are offered in Christ. In a real sense, each Sunday of the year is a "Cliff Notes" version of this drama: the Eucharistic Prayer is a re-telling of this story. But once a year we are invited to enter more deeply into this "never-ending story." Those who have experienced these services almost always return. But there are many who are new at St. Francis, who come from different traditions, for whom this is all new. I extend a special invitation to all of you to "come and see." It has been a long winter in New England, and a hard time in our nation and the world. We need to begin again. We need to renew our hope. Come and see...

Peace in Christ,
Rich

The Discerning Our Future Task Force [DOFTF] is nearing the completion of its mission and before long will be ready to pass on its findings to the vestry. So far, there has been an evening of Historical Reflection tracing the living history of St. Francis from our current incarnation back to its origins in the early 1950's. Thanks to Alice Carr and her newly published book about St. Francis this was an especially rewarding adventure. The DOFTF met after this event and gleaned some patterns threading themselves throughout St. Francis' history ... patterns which help shape who we are today.

The DOFTF next led us in a Ministry Assessment activity at this year's annual meeting, inviting us to share our take on what ministries at St. Francis excite us, which ones we can't do without, others that we want to revamp, and others on our wish list. All of these responses were collated and formulated into some helpful potential priorities for the vestry to consider. While this was happening, DOFTF members also selected several community leaders to interview, asking them what they see as needs within the larger community and how a church our size might meet some of these needs in our mission. These interviews are continuing and will be completed before the end of the month.

Still to come is a "norms inventory." On the weekend of May 2nd and 3rd Task Force Members will be available after each of the three services to walk us through a process of looking at "what we always do this way" but hardly ever stop to say what "this way" is. This is an engaging and insightful look into our current practices and habits which will help us be more fully the people of God we are called to be.

Thanks to all who have taken time to be involved in this season of prayer and discernment. Our special thanks to the Rev. Paul Taylor and the members of the DOFTF for guiding us through this process. See you on the weekend of May 2nd and 3rd.



Palm Sunday Children's Program

A special program for children in Church School will be offered during the Palm Sunday service this year. Children will participate in the palm procession with their parents but will then gather for special activities including:

- Children's Eucharist
- Prayer Walk – dramatization of Holy Week
- Dyeing eggs
- Crafts: preparing our church building for Easter!

The program will conclude at 12:30. Children who need to leave at 11:15 are still invited to participate in the first part of the activities.

Please sign up in the narthex or contact Susan Bastardo, Church School Coordinator, at smbslp22@hotmail.com or (508) 829-0600.

Holy Week Schedule

Palm/Passion Sunday Weekend ~ April 4th and 5th

5:00 p.m. Saturday and 8:00 & 10:00 a.m. Sunday
Liturgy of the Palms and Holy Eucharist

Maundy Thursday ~ April 9th 5:30 p.m. ~ Holy Eucharist and Foot washing ☺

6:15 p.m. ~ Potluck Supper

7:30 p.m. ~ Holy Eucharist, Foot washing, Stripping the Altar +
(followed by Gethsemane Watch in the church)

Good Friday ~ April 10th

8:00 a.m. ~ Morning Prayer (Gethsemane Watch concludes)

12:00 - 3:00 p.m. ~ Ecumenical Service begins at Gazebo

12:30 p.m. ~ First Congregational Church

1:30 p.m. ~ First Baptist Church

2:30 p.m. ~ St. Francis Episcopal Church

5:00 p.m. ~ Stations of the Cross

7:30 p.m. ~ Good Friday Liturgy +

Holy Saturday/Easter Vigil ~ April 11th

9:00 a.m. ~ Holy Saturday service

7:30 p.m. ~ The Great Vigil of Easter

Easter Sunday ~ April 12th (two identical services with choir)

8:00 a.m. ~ Festival Eucharist ☺+

10:00 a.m. ~ Festival Eucharist *☺+

*Nursery care available

☺ Service especially for children

+ Service with music



Thank you to all those who participated in the Guess Who's Coming for Dinner Fellowship event. This was a fun and exciting event with a tremendous participation from our St Francis community. We would like to thank the many people who helped to make it such a success. Thank you to all the New Comer Committee members. Kathy Halloran, Shirley Blehar, Donna Mann, Hathy Simpson, Chrisy Jones, Cindy Katinas, Mary Jude Pigsley and Dawn Rooke. Also we would like to give a very special thank you to our gracious hosts: Linda Letourneau, Rebecca and Tom Miller,

Donna and PJ Mann, Hathy and Rich Simpson, Jen and Craig Stanovich, Dawn and Brian Rooke, and Kathy and Bryan Diehl.

*Sincerely,
Linda Letourneau
Kathy Diehl*



On Sunday, April 26th, after the 10:00 a.m. service, at St. Clare House, the Newcomers Committee would like to invite any new members to join us for a social get together to welcome you to St. Francis. Light refreshments will be served.

Please join us so we may have the opportunity to introduce ourselves and our wonderful community of worship.

If you have any questions please call or email Kathy Diehl (508)829-4835 / khdiehl@charter.net or Linda Letourneau

(508)829-9430 / lrrkelly@aol.com



EfM Open House
Sunday, May 3rd from 4:00—6:00 p.m. at St. Clare House

EfM is a study of scripture and Christian tradition from the earliest period to the present time. The four year program covers the Old Testament, the New Testament, Church History, and Theological Choices. Participants in the program completed readings independently and then gather weekly to discuss the readings and engage in theological reflection. Although it is a four-year program, participants need only to register for one year at a time.

The meetings run from September to May. If you'd like more information, please join us at our Open House or contact Robin Carlo at rcarlo5@mac.com or Cynthia McIntyre at cynthia@concord.org.

Robin and Cynthia are the group mentors.

Senior Luncheon
Wednesday, May 20,
Eucharist at 11:00 am
Reception at 11:30 am
Luncheon at Noon



2009



Mission Matters



Mission Matters

As we approach Holy Week and Easter, you should know that your offerings during those holy days will again be shared with those in need. The Mission Committee has voted to distribute them as follows:

Holy Thursday: Greater Worcester Food Bank
Good Friday: Episcopal Bishop of Jerusalem
Easter: The Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance's
Walk for the Homeless

Hopefully, you have a chance to talk with the parishioners who recently traveled to El Salvador to see how the agricultural undertaking in Baja Lempe is progressing. They spent a day in that rural area working on an irrigation project that is part of the overall effort to reintroduce indigenous farming methods to the region. That effort, of course, has been funded by the capital campaign tithes contributed by the people of St. Francis to Fundacion Cristosal. The group was deeply impressed by the faith and commitment of the people whom they met and with whom they worked. They were touched by the experience and we all look forward to continuing this journey with our brother and sister El Salvadorans.

Please take a moment to check out the latest Mission Committee display in the Narthex. It highlights the efforts of Emily, a young Haitian woman studying to be a medical doctoring the Dominican Republic. Parishioners met Emily some years ago on a mission trip and she has visited St. Francis as well. The Mission Committee is helping to support her education .

Thank You ~ On Sunday, March 22nd, Bill Bernier of Heifer International presented the people of St. Francis with their 7th Ark Award, given for gifts over \$5,000. He commented that over the past 22 years St. Francis has contributed almost \$65,000 to Heifer International - enough for a fleet of Arks.



Prayer Shawl Ministry

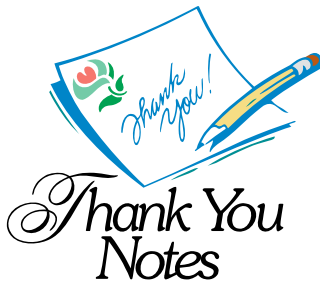
Next Prayer Shawl meeting is scheduled for
Monday, April 20th at 10:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall.

It always amazes and thrills me that each month we have Shawls to bless. Thank you one and all.

PS4FS (Prayer Shawls for Fallen Soldiers)

Good news also on this Ministry. There are fewer names on the database each passing month. We feel we are now approaching 'maintenance' status. Thank you for your prayers and support.

Beryl Turner



Thank you for the lovely gifts at Christmas and for the beautiful Valentines from Sunday School.

*Thank you.
God bless all of you. I love you.
Elizabeth Willett*

Thank you all for your prayers for my brother Joe these past months, and a special thank you to Beryl Turner, who sent Joe a prayer shawl from Florida recently. Joe had all but given up on recovering a few weeks ago, but he recently took a turn for the better. Amazingly, he is actually walking now, with the help of a walker that has been modified for him. Joe's best friend keeps telling him that his recovery has "something to do with the prayer shawl on the bed", and I couldn't agree more. I am deeply grateful for your prayers and support during this difficult time, and I ask for your continued prayers for Joe's recovery.

*Peace,
Julie Mankowsky*

Words cannot express my appreciation for the prayers and support shown to me during my recent surgery and recovery. The many cards were so thoughtful and encouraging. Rich was great, and Gloriann held down the fort in the office. I'm now fully recovered and back to work. I'm so thankful for this wonderful place to spend my days.

*God bless,
Karen*

**The deadline for the next Little Portion is
Thursday, April 16th**

Please have all information to the office by this date. You can leave it in the Office mailbox or email it to stfran@verizon.net.

The Little Portion will be mailed on Thursday, April 23rd.