

E-Portion ~ December 2007

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Advent Worship Schedule

Saturdays	5:00 p.m.	Holy Eucharist
Sundays	8:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist
	10:00 a.m.	Holy Eucharist
Wednesdays	7:00 p.m.	Holy Eucharist

**On the weekend of Advent 1—December 1/2 services will include prayers for Healing.

(There is no service on Wednesday, December 26th.)

From the Rector

In November I completed the fourth year of a program called *The Clergy Leadership Project* at Trinity Conference Center in West Cornwall, Connecticut. One of my instructors for three of the four years was a guy named Hugh O'Doherty, who is on the faculty at The Center for Public Leadership at the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University. (Some of you may know Hugh's colleague, Ron Heifitz, who has written a book called *Leadership Without Easy Answers*.)

The premise of their work is the distinction between technical solutions and adaptive work. As Americans we tend to think every challenge has a technical answer. If there is a problem with our educational system, for example, then we tend to think that legislation ("No Child Left Behind") or testing (MCAS) or better teachers or better curriculum will "solve" the problems. But rarely are we discerning enough, courageous enough, or patient enough to look at the underlying issues which defy simplistic "solutions."

We do the same things, of course, in the Church: if we want to grow the congregation we spend enormous energy looking for the next great program that will help us to do evangelism. But O'Doherty and Heifitz argue that the challenge of leadership is about challenging the community to do the hard work it needs to do *together* and that much of that work is about the opportunities that arise when there is conflict. Many of us tend to be conflict-avoiders; and so we tend to want to move from the discomfort of conflict into a quick fix. But if we can learn to stay with it we can ask the much more difficult question: where and how is God calling us to change?

This approach to leadership insists that neither "leaders" nor programs can fix what ails us. Rather, we face opportunities and challenges that require us to be present to one another in order to discover new possibilities together. One aspect of this approach builds on the language of M. Scott Peck in *The Different Drum: Community Making and Peace*. To move from what Peck calls "pseudo-community" to more authentic community you have to travel by way of conflict and chaos which initially, at least, leads to a sense of emptiness. On the other side of the emptiness, however, is a renewed sense of purpose.

That language begins to sound a lot like the Paschal mystery. The deep wisdom we discover through Jesus is that you can't have Easter without Good Friday. But even so, it seems to be a human tendency from which Christians are not immune to avoid conflict and emptiness.

The other half of my time in this final year in the program was spent with a Columbia University professor named Josh Ruxin, who is currently the director of the Millennium Village Project in Rwanda. (See <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/mv/index.htm> for further information.) He focused on the Millennium Development Goals, but (to borrow from the language of O'Doherty) not as a "technical fix" but as an opportunity to more deeply explore the challenges we face as a planet. This work we need to do is not about more relief work (something the Church tends to do reasonably well) but about the much harder work of being in relationships that lead toward justice and peace. When disaster strikes, it is in our consciousness and all over the twenty-four hour news cycle and we tend to respond generously to the needs that are set before us. But these are short-term challenges that are gone whenever Britney or Lindsay Lohan find themselves in trouble again. The much harder development work tends to be neglected in places like Rwanda, for example, after the genocide is over and the rebuilding of lives begins. But this is exactly the work that the Church is called to.

It is ironic, or maybe a better word is providential, that I was doing this theoretical learning while seven of our parishioners were in El Salvador. There, as in Rwanda, there is important but difficult work that is unfolding. That work begins when we begin to hear the stories we might just as soon not hear, yet they are stories that must be told. I think God is inviting us into an even deeper missional commitment in 2008, not simply to offer "technical solutions" to short-term problems but to more fully live out of the Baptismal Covenant and our promise to "strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being." (With God's help!)

As we come to the season of Advent, a hectic time in our lives—it is easy to be sucked even further into the temptation to define ourselves primarily or even exclusively as consumers. But at the end of Advent there is a startling gift: a child born into poverty for the sake of the world. In Jesus, we see the face of a God who empties himself in the form of a servant. The one we call Lord calls on us to serve. He also calls on us to do the work God gives us to do—hard work, but meaningful and fruitful work that gives us glimpses of the Kingdom that is coming, on earth as it is in heaven. Until there is peace on earth, and good will toward all people.

Shalom,

Stewardship Update

Thanks to all who have pledged for 2008. As always, I am truly grateful for the responses and how easy everyone makes this ministry. So far we have 128 pledges for 2008 totaling \$266,502. This is a 10% increase over last year for this same group. For those who like facts, it takes \$6,250 a week to do the work God has given us to do at St. Francis and the average weekly pledge is \$41. If you have not yet pledged and need a pledge card or have questions, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Laura Caswell
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Mission Matters

We come to December with all of its theological and cultural challenges reflecting on the past and the excitement of new birth. It has been a good year: we have helped feed and house people in Holden and Worcester; we dug a well in Africa, we advanced the work of the Church in Jerusalem and in China, we strongly supported the incredible work of Heifer International around the world. We committed a significant amount of money to a whole new project in El Salvador.

A group has gone to El Salvador and returned safely, and we are grateful to Mary Ann DiPinto, Nancy Brunelle, Lori Churchill, Jim Bourque, Mary Jude Pigsley, Graham Simpson, and Kathy Diehl for their commitment of time, energy, and spirit. They will be meeting as a group and with

Fundacion Cristosal to process what they have learned and what they propose that we do. At this point, it appears that the Annual Meeting will be the focal point for a full presentation to the parish.

In the meantime we have the **Living Gift Fair on December 2** before and after the 10 :00 a.m. Eucharist. There are the on-going needs of the **food pantry, Mustard Seed, the Christmas collection** that will assist the Family Health Center and Abby's House in Worcester; there is gratitude to express for the wonderful support given to the mitten, hat, and glove collection, the Crop Walk, the Katrina Rebuild Fund, and the Church Mouse Fair. There is never a lack of things to do.

Elsewhere in this newsletter Rich Simpson writes of his experience in a clergy leadership program and invites us to rethink with him our real calling as Christ's presence in the world. Doing so might mean that we need to rethink the very concept of "Mission". Is it the offering of "charity? Is it the demand for "justice"?

So, with confidence that we have done the right thing, we look forward to the *new* right thing. December...Advent...is a good time to do it.

Jim Bourque
Mission Team Leader

Living Nativity at Overlook Farm

The Christmas story will be reenacted at Heifer International's Overlook Farm, 216 Wachusett Street in Rutland on December 8th and 9th from 1:00 to 5:30 p.m. A live nativity, complete with animals will be presented at the beginning of each hour in the barn (dress warmly). Sleigh or hay rides will be available. Visit our gift shop featuring alternative gifts from Heifer International and free trade crafts from around the world. There is no charge for this event, but we ask everyone to bring a plate of cookies to share. An offering will be taken at the end of each presentation.

Whole Church Fellowship Event

**Sunday, December 16th
"Chrismons and Carols"**

Come join in a fun whole-church event for members of all ages!

We will gather in the narthex and library at 4:30 to make "Chrismons" – gold and white Christmas symbols to hang on our church tree. Patterns and materials are provided – these can be as simple or as ornate as you'd like!

At 5:30 we'll move into Fellowship Hall to share a simple dinner. Donations toward the purchase of pizza and subs would be appreciated!

At 6:00 we will visit shut-ins and nursing homes for Caroling.

We will then return to St. Francis for cocoa.

Each family is asked to bring a plate of cookies to share.

Come for the whole night or join in when you can! Please sign up in the narthex so we will have enough food for all!

"Living Creche"

This nativity pageant is a gift from the adults of our congregation to our children and is presented on Christmas Eve at the 4:30 p.m. service. Youth participation (Middle School, High School) is always welcome!

Preparation is minimal: scripts can be found with the sign up sheet, and we will have one rehearsal to "walk through" the script on the Sunday before Christmas (December 23rd) right after the 10:00 a.m. service. On Christmas Eve, participants need to show up a little early to get into their costumes. Children love to see familiar people telling the Christmas story in this way. Please consider signing up!

The pageant includes a creative movement piece done by stars (children ages 5 –10) and angels (children 10 and older). A sign-up sheet is on the table in the narthex and rehearsal time will be following the 10:00 a.m. services in December.

If you have any questions please see our Curate, Jill Williams.

WHAT THE HEALTH?!?!

A note from your Parish Nurse...

Rich and I attended an informational meeting with the *Better Ending Partnership* that provided information, resources and a forum discussion about end of life issues and their impact upon faith communities. Topics discussed were Health Care Proxies, the importance of obtaining a Will/Durable Power of Attorney (and what happens if you don't have one), financial issues and stewardship, your End of Life wishes – planning your funeral, burial, obituary, criteria for coverage of palliative and hospice care.

St. Francis had provided much of this information to our faith community a few years ago but with our church family growing we feel it would be good to provide this information again. We are a young faith community and there are many of us now beginning to deal with aging parents. We know that life is uncertain. It is helpful for us (and our families) as responsible Christians to be prepared when these uncertainties arise. I know that just the thought “end of life” is stressful enough but planning – even in small steps now – can help ease that stress for ourselves and loved ones when life, as we know it to be, calls us to the Heavenly Kingdom.

Rich and I hope to offer some short, informational sessions on areas that might be of interest to members of the parish; it would be helpful if you could speak with one of us about what your needs are in this important area of ministry. In the meantime, if you have questions or wish to have a conversation about any of these issues, feel free to contact me at: melindfors@charter.net or 508-829-2326.

Peace,
Mary Lindfors, RN
Parish Nurse

Advent Quiet Day

It is our custom at St. Francis to build in a half-day “spiritual retreat” in the midst of Advent and Lent. This year we'll gather at St. Clare House on Saturday, December 8th for this time of quiet and nourishment. Meditations will be led by the rector, with times for a walk or silent meditation in between.

A cost \$5.00 per person will cover food expenses.

The schedule will be as follows:

- 8:30 a.m. Gathering Time
- 8:45 a.m. Contemplative Morning Prayer
- 10:00 a.m. First Meditation, followed by a time for silent prayer and reflection
- 11:00 a.m. Second Meditation, followed by a time for silent prayer and reflection
- 12:00 p.m. Noonday Prayers and a simple lunch of soup, bread, and cheese

Please sign up on the sheet in the narthex.

Church School

Church School Advent Celebration

December 22/23 ~ The children will use the entire worship time for our Advent celebrations. Parents! If you're able to bring snack items for our parties, please sign up in the narthex. Cookies (homemade or store bought), brownies, "Munchkins," popcorn, juice. Thank you!

Please note: There will be no Church School on the weekend of December 29/30.

The Mitten Tree

The church school is continuing the Mission Team's work of collecting mittens, gloves, hats, and scarves to be distributed as gifts to those in need. The children will be reading *The Mitten Tree* (by Candace Christiansen) and learning what a lovely feeling it is to be able to give a gift of mittens so that other children will be warm this winter.

(*The Mitten Tree* tells the story of a lonely woman who knits mittens for all the children in town, beginning with the boy she noticed at the bus stop who didn't have any. She left a pair of hand knit mittens on a tree for him, though he didn't know who made them. In the end, she receives a gift of a basket of yarn, though she doesn't know who left it. Someone must know!)

During the month of December, our Christmas tree in Fellowship Hall will have pairs of construction paper mittens hanging on it. Please take a pair of paper mittens and replace them with a pair of real mittens (and/or gloves, a hat or a scarf) by December 23. Thank you!

Clown Alley Christmas Party Monday, December 10th at 6:00 p.m.

Come join the fun at this family oriented party offered to the St. Francis family by Clown Alley. It is an especially fun time for children under 10 years old, with goodies, Santa, balloons, face painting, music and fun! A sign-up sheet is on the table in the narthex.

Don't forget your cameras for photos with Santa.

Christmas Services Schedule

Monday, December 24th ~

4:30 p.m. Pageant with Eucharist

10:30 p.m. Festival Eucharist

Monday, December 25th ~

10:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist

Weekend after Christmas, December 29/30

5:00 p.m. & 10:00 a.m. Service of Lessons and Carols (no Eucharist)

8:00 a.m. Holy Eucharist

The deadline for the next Little Portion is Wednesday, December 12th

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, December 27th.