

## E-Portion – February 2009

*Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

(BCP 817, *For the Parish*)

Eleven years ago, on February 1, 1998, I began serving as the fifth rector of St. Francis Church. As we begin our twelfth year together I am amazed to be able to make the claim of being the second-longest tenured rector in the history of St. Francis Church. My immediate predecessor, our current diocesan Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Gordon Scruton, served as rector of St. Francis for fifteen years, from 1981 – 1996.

Shortly after my arrival at St. Francis we engaged in a process of exploration we called “Discerning Our Congregation’s Future.” The aim after having come through a lengthy search process was for us to set some strategic goals for the next five years or so of what was then a “new ministry” together. It was, among other things, an opportunity for us to get to know one another better as we set out on a journey—if not toward the “promised land” exactly, then at least towards God’s preferred future for us as a congregation.

Again in 2003 we went through a similar, although more abbreviated, process. That time of discernment led to the adoption of a new mission and vision statement that included six core values. (If you aren’t familiar with this document please see: [http://www.stfrancisholden.org/our\\_mission.cfm](http://www.stfrancisholden.org/our_mission.cfm))

We now find ourselves in the midst of an intentional discernment process once again. Some may wonder why: isn’t this the sort of thing you can do and then “check that off your list?” Don’t we already know who we are and what we are supposed to be doing? Isn’t this just a colossal waste of time? (No, only in part, and definitely not!)

When we have gone through this process before, we’ve discovered that the process itself is helpful in clarifying our mission and focusing our energies. Newer members are engaged at a deeper level. And as we undergo various changes along the way, we are changed as a community. From time to time it does help to step back and ask, “how are we doing?” Congregations are not static, and God is never finished with us—at least on this side of Paradise. To put it another way, we remain “a work-in-progress.”

Of course we know some things about St. Francis that are unlikely to ever change. Above all, we belong to Christ—and are seeking to live into (and out of) the Baptismal Covenant. We value the priesthood of all believers. In our peculiar history as a congregation at the corner of Phillips Road and Highland Street we have, over the course of more than fifty years, affirmed that the ministers of St. Francis are “all the people.” No parish, however, can be all things to all people. Holden is not the same town it was in 1959, or 1979 or even 1999—and the same thing can be said of all the communities our members come from. A congregation that isn’t aware of its context forgets that ministry is always contextual—which is simply to say we are called to love the neighbors we have today, not the ones we had forty years ago!

My experience is that change comes whether it is intentional or not. We cannot prepare for every contingency. There are global events that influence who we are and no strategic plan can account for something like 9/11 or the shockwaves that followed the consecration of Bishop V. Gene Robinson in 2003. As I look back on our two previous plans for ministry I note that we achieved some of our goals and work remains on others. But the process itself is helpful because it provides an opportunity to focus on what we do well and feel called to continue, as well as where we need work and where we need to “let go.”

So this process will not yield “all the answers” or usher in the Kingdom of God. But I do believe it will help us to be more faithful stewards of all God has entrusted to us, and to be more faithful ministers of the good news at the dawn of the second decade of the third millennium. As always, with God’s help.

Please keep the members of the Discerning Our Future Task Force in your prayers. Paul Taylor, a retired priest who worships at St. Francis on Saturday nights, is our guide in this process, along with the following parishioners: Melanie Amaral, Alice Carr, Dick Delorme, Bryan Diehl, Jr., MaryAnn DiPinto, Arthur Heinricher, Paul McIntyre, Julie Mankowsky, P.J. Mann, Rebecca Miller, Dawn Rooke, and Catie Simmons. When they have completed their work, sometime this spring, they will report back to the vestry, who will use the data received to set strategic goals to guide us in our mission over the course of the next five years or so. Stay tuned...

Faithfully,  
**Rich**

## Mission Matters



...Notes from your Mission Team

December saw the distribution of “Reindeer Bags” from the Rutland and Wachusett Food Pantries and a gifting of the Christmas offering to the Welcome Aldrich Fund for use at H.O.M.E.—Holden Outreach Managing Emergencies.

January welcomed The Very Reverend Richard A. Bower, Executive Director of Fundacion Cristosal for a snowy weekend visit. He spoke at each Eucharist and met with the group about to leave for El Salvador. He thanked St. Francis for the members’ generosity and challenged us to continue to accompany the people of that poor and still stricken land on their journey. His sermon is available for email transmission.

February will see eight people from St. Francis leave for a week in El Salvador. They are MaryAnn DiPinto, Nancy Brunelle, Lori Churchill, Roger Jones, Jen Delorme, Kathy Halloran, and Tom and Diane Wilson. They will spend some time in the area where St. Francis’ tithe has been committed this past year. They will review the work done on developing a program of indigenous farming in rural Baja Lempe and also visit the Diocesan ministries in the cities of San Miguel and San Salvador. Please keep them and the people whom they will meet in your prayers especially during the week they will be gone from February 14-20.

We offer continued thanks to Kathy Diehl for shepherding the El Salvador project and to Diane and Tom Wilson for organizing the sale of fair trade coffee and other items each week.



February Confirmation classes are Sunday, February 1st and Sunday, February 22nd at 11:30 a.m. in the Library.

Also, please plan to attend one of the Ash Wednesday services on February 25th with your mentor.

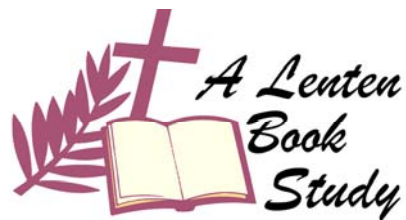


Here's What's Happening in Church School!

**Epiphany: January 4-February 22** – We started Epiphany with stories of Wise Men, Baptism and Jonah but will be spending the month of February focused on stories of healing.

**Lent: March 1-29:** During the season of Lent, we will be learning about how Jesus taught us to love God and our neighbor.

**Coming Up:** Palm Saturday - April 4th. Save the date!



*Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped by Grace*  
by Miroslav Volf (Zondervan, 2005)

Three Thursday Evenings at 7:30 p.m. – St. Clare House  
Led by the Rector

Thursday, February 26      ***De-Constructing A Distorted Faith***  
Letting go of “God the Negotiator” and “God the Santa Claus”  
(see especially pages 19-32 of *Free of Charge*)

Thursday, March 5      ***Re-imagining Faith***  
God as Giver and Forgiver  
Consider the opening sentences from Archbishop Rowan Williams in his forward to *Free of Charge*:  
*This is a book about worshipping the true God and letting the true God act in us. It tells us as plainly as possible that the true God is a God who cannot stop giving and forgiving, and that our knowledge of this true God is utterly bound up with our willingness to receive from the hand of God the liberty to give and forgive.*

Thursday, March 12      ***Conversation with a Skeptic***  
See the postlude in Volf's Book by this title



**Wednesday, February 25th**

Services of Holy Eucharist with Imposition of Ashes  
7:00 a.m., 4:30 p.m., 7:30 p.m.

**Shrove Tuesday Supper**

Tuesday, February 24th from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. Adults \$6, children \$4 –  
Proceeds will be donated to charity. Please see the sign up sheet in the narthex.

**Lenten Soup Suppers**

Wednesday, March 4, 11, 18, 25 and April 1  
6:00 p.m. – Soup Supper

Please see the sign up sheet in the narthex. If you would be willing to provide soup for one  
of the evenings please see the sign up sheet for that as well.



**Holy Eucharist and Healing**  
**Every Wednesday in Lent at 7:00 p.m.**

**Fridays in Lent**

8:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. *The Way of the Cross* (Stations)

The church will be open for personal prayers each Friday in Lent. Stop in at the church  
and, using a prayer booklet, pray the *Way of the Cross*.

**Lenten Quiet Day**

Saturday, March 7th

9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. at St. Clare House

Meditations will be led by the Rector followed by lunch. Please sign up sheet in the narthex.

**Refreshment Sunday Breakfast**

Save the date: Sunday, March 22nd

9:00 a.m. Join us for this mid-Lent breakfast.



*A heartfelt 'thank you' to Saint Francis people and to Jill Williams for her recent visit and giving of a filled bag of wrapped Christmas gifts and, of course, the Eucharist. It touched me so much! Thank you all.*

*I wish you, one and all, a healthy New Year, filled with positives of life and much happiness and God given joy.*

*Love,  
Anita Cole*



*I would like to thank the St. Francis family for all the support, prayers, cards and phone calls that I have received the past seven months.*

*Sincerely,  
Jane Howell*



*Dear St. Francis Family,*

*It was a joy having our rector, Rich Simpson, visit me with some lovely Christmas gifts from the "Crafty Ladies." I cherish Rich's visits and appreciate your remembering me.*

*Receiving mail each week from church keeps me in touch and I thank you all. May God bless you all with His love and peace.*

*My love,  
Marion Deranian*



The deadline for the next  
Little Portion is  
**Thursday, February 19th**

Please leave information in the Office mailbox or email it to [stfran@verizon.net](mailto:stfran@verizon.net).

The Little Portion will be mailed on Thursday, February 26th.