

E-Portion ~ November 2007

Thanksgiving Eve Potluck and Eucharist

From the Rector

Annual Pledge Kick Off October 27/28 ~In-Gathering November 17/18

Mission Matters

Newcomers Committee

Church School

Confirmation will be Saturday, April 26, 2008 at 5:00 p.m.

Another Successful St. Francis "Open"

Little Portion Deadline

Thanksgiving Eve Potluck and Eucharist

Join us for our Annual Thanksgiving Eve Potluck Supper. We will begin at 6:00 p.m. in Fellowship Hall. Watch for the sign-up sheet in the narthex. Holy Eucharist will begin at 7:00 p.m. in the church.

From the Rector

This month's Rector's Notes are excerpted from a longer meditation on Matthew 6:25-33 (see the front cover of this newsletter) offered at St. Matthew's Parish in Worcester, as part of their stewardship education. If you wish to read the complete version you can find it online at <http://www.holdenma.com/stfrancis/pdf/StewardshipMeditation.pdf>

"Don't worry," Jesus says. "Live your life one day at a time." It is old wisdom we are still trying to live into. It's the wisdom also found at the heart of twelve-step spirituality—wisdom you can find in other faith traditions as well. Because you cannot change the past, and you cannot control the future, there is only one way to really live life: be fully present and alive in this moment.

Jesus invites us in this teaching to do two things as an antidote to fear and anxiety. He invites us to look and to consider. To look at the birds of the air—to really look, until we can see. To open our eyes, and in so doing to see God's hand at work in the world around us. What does it mean to develop this discipline of looking and seeing with wide open eyes?

I know that when I get stressed, when I feel overwhelmed, when I become anxious, the first thing that happens is that I begin to go blind. I fail to see what is right before my very eyes. There is nothing magical or terribly mystical about this. It is something we tend to do reasonably well as children, and often lose in the midst of the rat race we sometimes confuse for living. To look means first of all to slow down. To look at the geese who somehow know when fall comes that it is time to fly south, or a child (or a grandchild) or the big dipper, or the sunset is to come back into ourselves. It's the first step, I think, to healing the anxiety that inflicts us.

Second, Jesus encourages us to consider "the lilies of the field." I love that because we can talk about being stewards of God's good creation, of taking care of "this fragile earth our island home"—and we should. But Jesus wants us to notice the details. We might just as easily consider raking leaves not as a chore that needs to be done, but as a spiritual exercise: consider the leaves. Or the marvel of how a maple tree can produce something that tastes so incredibly good on pancakes: consider that sweet syrup. Or consider spending a day on the top of Mt. Wachusett. When we consider the world we move into the right hemisphere of our brains to ponder and to be amazed and to wonder and to ask questions.

We are made for meditation and for contemplation. They are not an escape from reality but the pathway to discovering what is really real: when we look and consider we are called back into ourselves, back into our bodies again, back into "the Body of Christ" again. And once there, it is amazing how quickly we begin to let go of our fears and our worries and our anxieties.

Now you may think that I have forgotten why I was invited here in the first place. But maybe in the few remaining minutes I can try to explain why I think this has everything to do with why we are here. I am a parent with two teenagers who want to go to college. I am a relatively young man, told that I may not be able to count on social security so I need to plan for retirement. There is so much to be anxious about. I am a pastor, so I also understand the anxiety that can arise in congregations around this time of year when we ask people to share more of their time, talent, and treasure. We

worry about how to do that and very often we begin with the premise, stated or unstated, that there doesn't seem to be enough of any of those things.

In the face of all of that fear, institutional preservation begins to kick in. We want our congregation to be able to pay the bills, and so we start to confuse Christian fundraising for the spiritual practice of stewardship. Our anxiety blinds us to the harvest that is right before our very eyes. In those moments Jesus invites us to look and to consider.

Someone has said that if the only prayer you ever offer to God is "thanks" it will be enough. There is so much to be thankful for. Thankfulness isn't about having it all; it's about being thankful for what we do have and mindful of the needs of others so that in our desire to share we open our hands, and our hearts, in love.

Part of our New England heritage is that we have been taught not to talk much about money and quite frankly we sometimes try to defend what is really miserliness as "Yankee thriftiness." We need to get over that. I don't have a big "sales pitch" about giving in the church for you today, or a magic formula. I can tell you this—I think too many stewardship campaigns are rooted in anxiety, and I pray that yours will not be. I pray that it will be grounded in prayer and in a commitment to be growing as disciples of Jesus Christ. Stewardship is not first and foremost about money, but it has to include our money because otherwise it becomes a sham.

When we gather at our various tables each day of the year, or on Thanksgiving, or for a meal like this one today, we always have a choice: we can find fault and collect grievances and fixate on negative behaviors (all of which serve only to fuel anxiety and worry!) or...we can look, and we can consider. In so doing, we begin to discover there is so much to be thankful for—and that attitude of gratitude opens us up to a deeper relationship with Christ. We begin to see how the harvest really is plentiful and the laborers few. And perhaps we begin to wonder: maybe Jesus actually means for me to be one of those few, one of those who is taking the next steps in faith, sent out into the harvest to do the work that God gives us to do.

Peace,
Rich

Annual Pledge Kick Off October 27/28 ~In-Gathering November 17/18

Each year the vestry is asked to make their pledge commitments before the congregation does so. As a group, those leaders who have pledged as The Little Portion goes to print represent an average pledge of \$4,444, an 8% increase over all from last year's giving."

This year's pledge drive starts the weekend of October 27/28. Please take your pledge packet home with you after the services that weekend and return them no later than November 17/18. In between, please prayerfully and thoughtfully consider what response you will give to God's gifts to you in your life and the parish life of St. Francis. How will you support God's work in the world to be done through our parish and through yourself?

For the Stewardship Committee,
Laura Caswell

Mission Matters

Thanks to the Congregation for all you do..... and continue to do.....and especially.....

- to Donna Alarie and all her volunteers who worked on this year's Church Mouse Fair.
- to Sue Delorme, Jane Dye and all who walked and volunteered for the Crop Walk.
- to Bev Giarusso for coordinating the United Thank Offering collection and all who contributed.
- to Kathy Nichol who is coordinating the hats, mittens and gloves project and to all who have brought items in.

From November 9th through 15th a group of seven St. Francis parishioners will be visiting the Anglican Church in El Salvador to discern what we might do together to bring healing and life to its people. We will commission those heading out on this mission trip at the 5:00 p.m. and 10:00 a.m. services on the weekend of November 3 & 4. Please keep them all in prayer while they are away from us. They are.....Jim Bourque, Nancy Brunelle, Lori Churchill, Kathy Diehl, Mary Ann DiPinto, Mary Jude Pigsley and Graham Simpson.

There has been a lot of rain and expected flooding in El Salvador and we've been asked by Dick Bower, the director of Cristosal (the group we're working with) to keep all in our prayers. The poor will be most hard hit, and he asked especially for us to keep them in prayer.

The Lord's Prayer: Spanish

Padre nuestro que estás en el cielo, Santificado sea Tu nombre.
Father of ours, who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.

Hágase tu voluntad así en la tierra como en el cielo. Danos hoy nuestro pan de cada día.
May your will be fulfilled in earth and heaven. Give us today our daily bread.

Perdona nuestras ofensas así como perdonamos a los que nos ofenden.
Forgive our offenses as we forgive those who offend us.

No nos dejes caer en la tentación y líbranos del mal.
Do not let us fall into temptation and liberate us from evil. *Amén.*

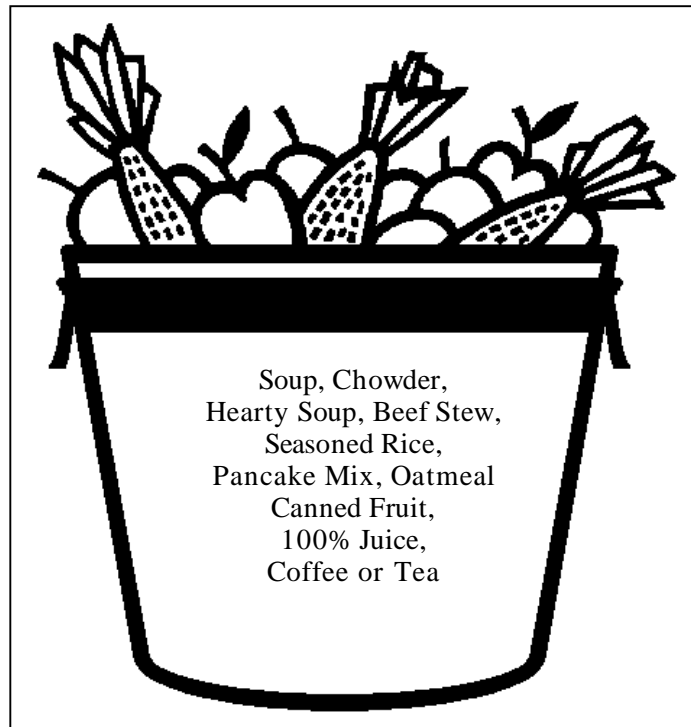
Newcomers Committee

The next Newcomers Gathering will be held Friday evening, November 30, 2007, at the St. Clare House-Save the Date! If you have any questions, please contact Kathy Diehl at kdiehl@charter.net or Linda Letourneau at lkkelly@aol.com.

Church School

Church School Food Collection

On the weekend of November 17/18 we will be collecting food for the Wachusett Food Pantry. Below is a list of suggested items. Donations can be left in the baskets in the narthex. However, children are asked to bring their donations to church school so they can present them at the altar during the Offertory. Drivers will be needed on Sunday, November 18th after the 10:00 a.m. service to transport food over to First Baptist Church.



Attention Third Grade Students and Parents

Bibles were distributed to all students who are currently in 3rd grade as well as to students in 4th -6th grade who are new to St. Francis. Bibles of students who were not here on the week of presentation have been left in the classrooms. If you did not receive your Bible, please see your teacher. If they do not have one for you, please contact Susan Bastardo (Church School Coordinator.) Thank you!

Prayer for our Confirmands and their Mentors

O God, you prepared your disciples for the coming of the Spirit through the teaching of your Son Jesus Christ: Make the hearts and minds of your servants ready to receive the blessing of the Holy Spirit, that they may be filled with the strength of his presence; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Confirmation will be Saturday, April 26, 2008 at 5:00 p.m.

Please keep our confirmands and their mentors in your prayers as this year unfolds.

Kathryn Anderson and Bev Giarusso
Conor Boyan and Dawn Rooke
Bryan Diehl and Sean Farrell
Matthew DiPinto and Mark Apholt
Joe Grinstead and Art Heinricher
Courtney Jones
Alex Nowak and Laura Caswell
Erica Rayworth and Robin Carlo
Lindsay Russell and Lori Churchill
Patrick Sullivan and Bill Turgeon
Sam Tripp and Susan Bastardo

Another Successful St. Francis "Open"

Thanks to Dorothy Granger and Cynthia McIntyre for organizing this year's parish golf tournament and the picnic that followed at St. Clare House. We had twenty-four golfers and a gorgeous day at Kettlebrook Golf Course. Congratulations also to Eric, Burt, and Joe Grinstead and their friend Joe, winners for the second consecutive year in a closely contested match.

The deadline for the next Little Portion is Thursday, November 15th

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, November 29th.