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October 26, 2006

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Rector's Column

The Stewardship Committee has written a superb letter to the parish to kick off our fall pledge campaign. In that letter, they have brought the annual budget down to manageable terms by reminding us that it costs \$750 per day to keep the doors of St. Francis Church open. That's what it takes for us to do the ministry we feel called to in supporting the wider ministry of the Episcopal Church and Anglican Communion, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, tending the sick, paying the staff, buying the music, running the church school and youth groups, heating the church, removing the snow, cutting the lawns, and so on and so forth.

I've been reflecting a bit on those numbers. Our average attendance is around 240 in church each weekend. (That includes everyone in attendance at all three services, including the nursery.) Ponder this: if every man, woman and child pledged \$10/week each (or \$40 a week for a family of four) we wouldn't make it to June! Our doors would close right around Memorial Day. To say it another way: if the plates went out and then came back with \$2400 each week we'd be at less than half of the resources needed to do the work God has given us to do.

There are some among us who are like the widow with her mite (see Mark 12:38-44), for whom \$10/week truly represents sacrificial giving. In fact, most of our parishioners on fixed incomes do give sacrificially—and far more than \$10/week. Whatever the dollar amount, like the widow in the story, they give "all that they have."

Mostly, though we are a fairly young parish at St. Francis. Most of us are at the other end of life's journey: young adults raising children, with mortgage payments and college on the horizon. Many at St. Francis are new to the church as adults, which is a wonderful blessing. Some of us remember our parents handing us a dollar in church for us to put into the plate as it came by. But some of us have not yet had someone in our lives to help us to reflect deeply on what our giving needs to be as adult members of Christ's Body.

Consider this: a family of four can't go to see a movie these days for less than \$40. Yet when it comes to pledge season some feel that the same pledge is "beyond what they could possibly manage." Yet as already stated, if every man, woman and child pledged \$10 each per week we wouldn't make it six months into the year! We clearly need to consider what role the Church really does play in our lives, and why it matters, and where it ranks in our priorities. As followers of Jesus we need to give, because giving is at the heart of the faith we profess.

Since I know what you pledge, I think it's only fair that you should know what Hathy and I will pledge for the work of ministry at St. Francis in 2006: \$100 per week, or \$5200 for the year. To be honest this is no longer a very big decision or conversation in our home. We made the decision to tithe years ago and it is the first check we write, and we have never missed it. Some people speak of tithing as if it's magical. As I tend to be pretty practical about money, simply saying "it all works out" sounds trite to my ears. I want to know *how* it works out.

For us, as parents in our forties, we are committed to planning for our retirement and for our kids' college educations. So there a significant percentage of our paychecks we choose to never see. And of course there is an even more significant percentage that goes to Washington, DC and Beacon Hill. Of our *net* income--the money that actually goes into our checking account--we pledge 10% to St. Francis. *All* of the rest of our financial decisions follow that one. There is nothing magical about that: we simply decide what automobiles we can afford to drive, what vacations we can take, what restaurants to eat at based on what is left AFTER our pledge; not the other way around.

Sometimes people get legalistic on a "tithe." (Is it on gross or net? Is it to all "charities" or just to the church?) As I tend to NOT be legalistic in anything else I don't see how I can be on this one issue! For me the faith issue is about keeping first things first, not on defining what a "tithe" is down to the last bit of mint and cumin (see Matthew 23:23).

It is about proportional giving: that is, about giving back to God the *first fruits* of our labors. The giant leap is in the move to put God first in our lives. That is why God gets the *first* day of the week—so that we can make it through the next six days! (If we follow the culture and call Sunday the *weekend* then most of us will find ourselves too exhausted at the end to have anything left for God.) It represents a change of mind—a change of heart—to give back to God the first portion of our money as well; and I am convinced that if we take care of first things first, then all the rest follows.

Our consumer culture teaches us another way to manage our money: to satisfy our "desires" -- not even our needs. In fact advertising is all about creating desires we didn't even know we had! And since most of us are pretty insatiable in our desires we may well find ourselves borrowing on credit to literally keep up with the Joneses. It is truly a recipe for financial ruin—and the credit card companies will be only too eager to take their pound of flesh.

Too many of us wait until the "end of the week" to see what's left. And the answer is predictable: usually not much—not much time, not much energy, not much money. We wonder quite literally where it went. We've left undone the things that need to be done and done the things we ought not to have done. In contrast, when we put first things first, we choose to relate to money for what it really is: a means, not an end. We refuse to let it control us by making choices about our spending habits. That is ultimately what good stewardship is all about.

So I encourage you to use this time in November as an opportunity to grow in your faith. As you consider your pledge for 2007, give thanks for all that Christ has done in your life, and specifically the ways that St. Francis Church has been "Christ" to you in your journey. My prayer is that together, our financial support for the mission and ministry of St. Francis Church will once again take us all the way to December 31!

Annual Pledge Kick Off - Oct 28/29 In-Gathering November 18/19

To date, the leadership of the parish (vestry, stewardship committee and clergy) have sent in 18 pledges for a total of \$75,285. This is a \$11,026 increase over last year's giving by these same eighteen.

This year's pledge drive starts the weekend of Oct 28/29. Please take your pledge packet home with you after the services that weekend and return them Nov 18/19. In between, please prayerfully & thoughtfully think about what your contribution to St. Francis will be for the next year. I like to think about it in terms of what St. Francis means to me and my family and the blessings we have received, and continue to receive, and what I can do to give back to this parish that means so much to me and them.

For the Stewardship Committee,
Laura Caswell

Gift for Audrey Cronin ~ Anyone who would like to contribute to a gift for Audrey (a deacon's stole) can do so by making a check payable to 'St. Francis Church, Rector's Discretionary Fund' not later than November 5. Audrey will be with us on the 12th and we'll present her with the gift on that day.

All Saints Day Eucharist ~ Wednesday, November 1st at 7:00 p.m. All Saints will also be celebrated on the weekend of November 4/5.

Fall Clean Up Day/Blue Jean Sunday ~ Sunday November 5th, 11:30 a.m. Come lend a hand as we clean up the leaves around St Francis Church and St Clare House! Jump in the leaves and have a cup of cider. Many hands make light work. It should take about an hour, if we get enough help. Will you help us? Bring your own rakes and blankets/tarps to haul the leaves. Leaf blowers are really helpful if you can bring them. See Bryan Diehl with any questions.

Thank You

On Tuesday, October 17 ("The Feast of Ingatius of Antioch") I was received into the Fellowship of St. John, at the Society of St. John the Evangelist in Cambridge. I just wanted to thank you all for your prayers and encouragement as I have taken this step in my own spiritual journey.

Since some of you have asked: the Rule for the Fellowship is shaped by daily prayer, both silent meditation and a form of the Daily Office that includes reflection on Holy Scripture. It is focused on health in body, mind, and spirit and includes time for annual retreat during the year. (I usually take my retreats in Advent and Lent to help prepare spiritually to lead the congregation in celebrating our two great feasts of Christmas and Easter.) More information about this community can be found at <http://www.ssje.org/>.

Rich

You have probably all noticed by now the two brick posts with light fixtures on top that shine in the darkness to illumine the way to the parking lot. These fixtures like all that happens at St. Francis came by way first of a generous gift from Allen and Barbara Beck. Once the vestry approved the gift and design for these lights, Bryan Diehl and Doug Turner took the leadership in lining up the contractors who could make it happen. Thanks to all of them for their efforts!

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 Sunday, May 6, 2007 at 10:00 a.m. *Please keep our confirmands and their mentors in your prayers as this year unfolds.*

Christopher Bullock and Will Ames
Abigail Goewey and Phyllis Pomerleau
Alexander Heinricher and Roger Jones
Jacob Monroe and Sam Davenport
Chelsea Stanovich and Kathy Diehl
Sarah Trafton and Susan Bastardo
Sarah Zlody and Robin Carlo

Andrew Farrar and Dick Delorme
Griffin Reilly and Elisa Heinricher
Kellen Joyce and Chuck Manero
Graham Simpson and Lew Evangelidis
Julianna Thibeault and Julie Russell
Katlyn Urso and Diane Joyce

Church School Food Collection ~ On the weekend of November 18/19 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 Nov. 19th after the 10:00 service to transport food over to the Baptist Church.

Items needed: Soup, Chowder, Hearty Soup, Beef Stew, Seasoned Rice, Pancake Mix, Canned Fruit, Oatmeal, 100% Juice, Coffee or Tea

SURVEY SAYS.....The results of the Diocesan Survey which was completed in April are in. Each month in the Little Portion we will reveal pertinent information obtained from your responses.

THIS MONTH: A CONGREGATIONAL PROFILE

1. We are a middle size congregation – with 225 attendees; 59% are women
2. The average age of our worshipers is 51; with 45 to 64 being the largest age group.
3. 75% have college or graduate degrees.
4. 68% are married and 65% have children at home.
5. 73% of the Congregation is excited about the Congregation's future.
6. 84% say we have a clear vision for the future and 78% are committed to that vision.
7. 85% of people feel their spiritual needs are being met at the Congregation. (National average is 83%)
8. 91% of parishioners agree that there is a good match between the congregation and the minister.
9. 93% contribute financially to the parish. Only 8% contribute 10% or more of their yearly income (tithing). (The national average is 19% for tithing.)

Investiture to welcome Katharine Jefferts Schori as 26th Presiding Bishop

On Saturday, November 4th at Washington National Cathedral, the Episcopal Church will welcome Katharine Jefferts Schori as its 26th Presiding Bishop. During the Investiture, Jefferts Schori will receive symbols of office, including the primatial staff to be presented by the 25th Presiding Bishop, Frank T. Griswold, whose nine-year tenure concludes as Jefferts Schori's begins on November 1.

As Presiding Bishop, Jefferts Schori, 52, will become chief pastor to the Episcopal Church, which includes more than 2.4 million members in some 7,600 congregations in 111 dioceses spanning 16 countries. She will also join the Anglican Communion's Primates Meeting, a body of principal bishops who oversee the Communion's 38 member Provinces, of which the Episcopal Church is one.

Jefferts Schori is the first woman in Anglicanism's five-century history to serve in this capacity. She has served as bishop of the Diocese of Nevada since 2001. A former university professor, Jefferts Schori is an experienced oceanographer and airplane pilot. She and her husband, Richard Miles Schori, a retired theoretical mathematician, have one daughter, Katharine Johanna, 25, who is a first lieutenant and pilot in the U.S. Air Force.

Adult Education Offerings ~

Outrageous Women in the Bible, Part 1 ~ An Exploration of Matthew 1

Tuesdays, November 28, December 5, 12, 19—7:30 pm at St. Clare House.

- A. Tamar (Matthew 1:2) - Genesis 38
- B. Rahab (Matthew 1:5a) - Joshua 2:1-21, 6:22-25

- C. Ruth (Matthew 1:5b) - Ruth 2-4
- D. "The Wife of Uriah" (Matthew 1:6) - 2 Samuel 11-12, 1 Kings 15:5

Bible 101: Opening the Bible

Sunday, November 19th

1:00—4:00 p.m. at St. Clare House

Many people are afraid to show up at a Bible Study because they fear that they don't know how to begin, or where to begin, in opening the Bible. This is a class truly for beginners (or anyone who feels like a beginner). An introduction that explores how the Bible came to be, an outline of its history; and some approaches for reading Biblical texts in ways that are both critical and faithful.

Mission Matters

October has been a busy, busy Mission month—and one that has given us a reason to be so very thankful!

UTO (United Thank Offering) coordinated by Bev Giarusso collected and sent \$1,000 as our portion to the Diocesan Convention in Springfield, MA.

CROPWalk coordinated by Lori Churchill, the Youth Group, and Sue Delorme raised \$1,500 from St. Francis and a total of \$10,000 to help fight hunger here and around the world.

Church Mouse Fair was coordinated by Barbara Beck and the entire Mouse Brigade. Please see "Tidbits from the Church Mouse".

Praise Be to God!!!

Did you know that **Habitat for Humanity** has started building another duplex home on Stowell Ave, Worcester? Half will be funded and built by students from our local colleges and half by interested community faith groups.

Remember the Veterans this Veteran's Day ~ On November 11/12, your Mission Team will sponsor a "Drop in the Bucket" collection for the Montachusett Veterans group. Monies raised will help fund programs for local area veterans. More information will be available in the bulletins.

Heifer Living Gift Market—Coming December 3

The Mission team hopes to raise money for an arkful of animals (\$5000.00). Heifer provides food producing animals and training in their care to families in need around the world. Our Gift Market has become a St. Francis tradition of help—helping people around the world to live longer, healthier and more productive lives.

Save the date—December 3rd—you can make a world of difference in the lives of people less fortunate!

Prayer Shawl Ministry ~ Don't forget...the next prayer shawl meeting is Monday, November 20th at 10:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall. All are welcome. Call Barbara Beck (508-829-3045) for more information. Hope to see you there.

This year's **Thanksgiving Offering** has been designated for Centro Las Americas, Worcester. Established in 1977, Centro Las Americas is a multi-service non-profit Latino organization whose primary purpose is to serve, empower and advocate in the greater Worcester community.

- ◆ Provides food to those in need.
- ◆ Helps with Food Stamp registrations.
- ◆ Hosts an annual turkey drive which enables over 300 families to enjoy a hot nutritious holiday meal.

For more information check out their website at www.centrolasamericas.org .

Please share your blessings with the hungry this Thanksgiving!

Submitted by Jeanne Schutte for the Mission Team.

Bunny Huddleston, Chairperson 508-886-4969 – darrellandbunny@msn.com

Tidbits from the Church Mouse

Sincerest thanks to one and all for your kind and generous support of this year's Church Mouse Fair. Whether yours was a small act of kindness...or a large one you did make a difference and your were appreciated. Regardless of the income produced, the Church Mouse Fair can always claim success because its proceeds are allocated for feeding the hungry. No one's contribution of time and dedication is ever too small to be gratefully acknowledged; but, because so many give of their time and talent, it is truly impossible to , individually, thank everyone who deserves to be thanked.

Nevertheless special thanks go to the Becks, the Hennigars, the Hendersons, the Popes, the Carrigans, Jane Howell, Sharlene O'Connor, Paul Harges, Donna Alarie, Betty Hofstra and Kathy Nicoll who worked tirelessly all week to sort and price the Attic Treasures and set up for the Fair.

This year's Fair realized a net income of more than \$4,000 to be used for bringing the gift of food and caring to young and old in Worcester County and beyond ~ including monthly dinners at the Mustard Seed in Worcester, where over 200 people know the miracle of Christ's command to "...feed the hungry." It's no small miracle when those who are hungry and lonely experience the love and kindness of the St. Francis family, offered in the Name of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

The next Little Portion deadline is Thursday, November 16th.

Thanksgiving Potluck and Eucharist Potluck will begin at 6:15 p.m. Watch for the sign-up sheet in the narthex. The Eucharist will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the church.

Vestry Nominations Nomination sheets can be found on the table in the narthex. Deadline for nominations is November 19, 2006.

Next Month

Clown Alley Christmas Party—Monday, December 11th at 6:30 p.m. in Fellowship Hall

An Advent Event—Sunday, December 17th at 4:30 p.m. A family program with Chrismon making, a pot-luck supper, caroling, cocoa and cookies.

Check out the next Little Portion for details on these two family holiday programs.