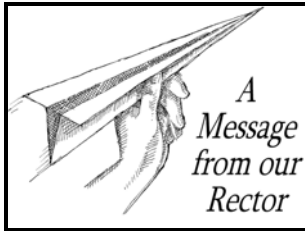


## E-Portion – September 2008



*"There is a candle in your heart,  
ready to be kindled.  
There is a void in your soul,  
ready to be filled.  
You feel it, don't you?"*

*-Rumi, 13<sup>th</sup> century Persian poet and Islamic theologian-*

This past June I had an opportunity to attend a week-long seminar on Christian-Muslim relations at Georgetown University. Our diverse group was male and female, young and old, ordained and lay, conservative and liberal, Christian and Muslim. In the mornings we spent our time learning something of the theological traditions of the other, particularly by reading each other's sacred texts. So the Christians would study the Qur'an, including the sūrah found on the cover of this issue of *The Little Portion*, which functions for Muslims in much the same way that the Lord's Prayer functions for Christians—it is recited every time Muslims gather together for worship. In the meantime, the Muslims gathered with their Oxford Annotated Bibles to study the Gospels of Mark and John. In the afternoons we had joint conversations with each other and an opportunity for discussion, questions, and reflection. Toward the end of the week, the Muslims attended mass at Holy Trinity Parish in Georgetown (a Roman Catholic parish run by the Jesuits) and visited with the clergy at local Episcopal and Lutheran congregations; the Christians attended Friday prayers at a Virginia area mosque and met with their leaders afterwards over lunch.

I am still processing this rich experience and this space doesn't allow for me to share all that I might eventually want to say about the value of this exchange. But as we commemorate the seventh anniversary of the 9/11 attacks and continue to sort out Middle Eastern policy and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, I want to share some thoughts that grow out of this experience, which I hope may be helpful for others.

- 1. All religious faith and practices are deeply intertwined with culture and politics and it is impossible to compartmentalize the "spiritual" or the "theological" as something separate from the various world we inhabit.* It is helpful for us to remember, in this vein, that all Muslims are not Arabs and all Arabs are not Muslims. In fact, Arabs make up about 15% of the total population of 1.7 billion Muslims, the largest number of whom live in Indonesia. There are significant minorities of Arab Christians living in the Middle East, especially in Lebanon, Syria, and Jordan. Most importantly, and it should go without saying, is that all Arabs (whether Christian or Muslim) are not terrorists. Adolf Hitler was raised in the Roman Catholic Church, but I know of no one who claims that his thoughts accurately represented Catholic theology.
- 2. Both Christianity and Islam are 'contested' religions.* Or to say it another way, within each of these great traditions there are debates going on between more fundamentalist interpretations of the traditions and more pluralistic interpretations. As Episcopal Christians we know that every word spoken by Benedict XVI or Pat Robertson doesn't express our understanding or practice of the Christian faith. Yet there is a temptation to define Islam in monolithic ways that are based on the most ridiculous statements that may be made by a few people yet do not represent the vast majority of Muslims. We need to resist that temptation.
- 3. We must also resist the temptation in our conversations with others, including Muslims, to contrast our ideals with their failures.* We might like to describe our own faith as a religion of love and we are on solid ground in so doing. Perhaps we might quote I Corinthians 13 or John 13:34 as central to who we Christians aspire to be. But it's easy to dismiss harder texts like Matthew 10:34 or Numbers 31, as we put our best foot forward. More troubling, however, is when we then contrast our "love" with a few of the most problematic texts from the Qur'an that suggest intolerance and fear, ignoring the overwhelming core of Islam

which focuses on right relationship with God and all humankind. The great gift of spending time actually reading the Qur'an in the presence of Muslims was to be able to begin making judgments about what it does say: primarily that as children of Abraham, Jews, and Christians we are fellow pilgrims and "people of the book" who worship the same God and therefore deserve to be treated with respect. This is not to suggest that Islam doesn't have its own difficult texts or that the challenges within Islam are identical to those Christianity faces. Rather, it is simply to insist that the challenging texts in both traditions need to be read within this larger context.

While I returned home knowing more about Islam, the paradox is that I found this experience deepened my own Christian faith and made me an even more committed "follower of God in the way of Jesus."\* Muslims and Christians do not believe the same things; we *are* different. I have never been a fan of inter-faith (or for that matter ecumenical) conversations that ignore those differences. But our awareness of those differences must never negate what we do share in common. Experiences like the one I was able to participate in invite us to move beyond fear and toward understanding, and through deeper understanding perhaps we can work together (along with Jews) to promote peace and justice. The well-being of our planet depends on it.

My prayer, then, is that as we remember the victims of 9/11 and rightly condemn all terrorist actions that we are also intentional about taking action that leads to both personal and communal transformation. We Christians might begin by critiquing the false stereotypes of Muslims that abound through our mass media and instill mistrust, not because we are naïve but because those stereotypes violate the commandment of Moses that we not bear false witness against our neighbor and because they violate the commandment of Jesus that we love our neighbor (and even our enemy.) This does not ever mean that we need to agree with our neighbor, whether she or he is a Christian, Jew, Buddhist, Hindu, or despiser of religion. But this commandment to love certainly requires at a bare minimum a willingness to be truthful and to engage "the other" by listening and being challenged, so that the love we so rightly claim in the name of Jesus can truly cast out every fear that threatens to undue us.

Salām (سلام),  
Rich

\*I am indebted to Brian McLaren for his use of this phrase in his new book, *Everything Must Change: Jesus, Global Crises, and a Revolution of Hope*. I like this way of saying it because it reminds me that there are others who seek to follow God as well and there is much we do share in common; but I remain clear that for me this Way is in and through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

## FALL SCHEDULE



### Weekend of September 6th & 7th

**Return to regular worship schedule**

**Saturdays at 5:00 p.m.**

**Sundays at 8:00 & 10:00 a.m.**

**Wednesday nights at 7:00 p.m.**

### **Commissioning of Lay Ministers**

All three services.

### **Church School Move-Up**

Saturdays at 4:45 p.m. and Sundays at 9:45 a.m.

**Youth Group regular meetings begin Sunday, September 14th**

Junior High at 4:00 p.m. Senior High at 6:30 p.m.

### **Choir Rehearsals**

Sundays at 8:00 a.m.

*Looking ahead.....*

**Confirmation Class**

Sunday, September 21

Informational meeting with parents and potential Confirmands

11:30 a.m. in the Scruton Library

*\*If you are entering 10th grade and did not receive a confirmation registration packet, please notify the church office.*

Sunday, October 5

Commissioning of Confirmands with Mentors at the 10:00 a.m. service.

Class Meeting with Mentors (after the service)

**Newcomers Committee Meeting**

Sunday, September 21

following the 10:00 a.m. service at St. Clare House

*For more information on the Newcomers Committee please contact*

*Linda Letourneau at [Irkelly@aol.com](mailto:Irkelly@aol.com) or 508-829-9430*

**Celebration of the Feast of St. Francis**

Weekend of October 4th and 5th

**Blessing of the Animals**

Sunday, October 5th at 3:00 p.m.



The Church School program is available for children who are in preschool (age 3 by September 1<sup>st</sup>) through grade 6. Classes will begin with "Move Up" parties on the weekend of Sept. 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>. Children should arrive 15 minutes before the 5:00 PM or 10:00 AM services and join their classes in the following rooms:

Saturday One-Room School house: Upstairs Faith Room

Sunday Preschool/Kindergarten: Upstairs Faith Room

Sunday 1<sup>st</sup>/2<sup>nd</sup> grade: Upstairs Hope Room

Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> grade: Upstairs Charity Room

Sunday 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> grade: \*St. Clare House

The Rite 13 program will be available for students in grades 7 and 8, and will meet in the St. Clare House from 9:30-10:30.

Registration begins on August 23<sup>rd</sup>. **Forms need to be completed on all students**, even if they are not new to the program, since these forms are given to the child's teachers. If you have any questions about this program, please contact the Church School Coordinator, Susan Bastardo, at (508) 829-0600 or [SMBslp22@hotmail.com](mailto:SMBslp22@hotmail.com).

Fall Start Up Schedule:

Aug. 23/24: Registration begins

Sept. 6/7: Church School Move-Up Day

Sept. 13/14: Classes begin

\*The St. Clare house is the small blue house at the end of the parking lot.

**Saturday Workshop Leaders Needed**

A modified "Workshop Rotation Model" will be used for both the Saturday and Sunday programs. Lessons will be based on stories from this year's Revised Common Lectionary. Themes will be presented in several ways over a period of 3-6 weeks. Our hope is that the

children will not only enjoy the varied activities (including art, drama, puppetry, cooking, games, and videos) but will also gain a deeper understanding of the stories through multiple presentations using a range of modalities.

Volunteers will be needed on Saturday nights to be workshop leaders for 3-6 week rotations. Topics and rotation weeks will be as follows:

- Sept. 13-27: Moses (Part 1)
- Oct. 4: St. Francis
- Oct. 11-25: Moses (Part 2)
- Nov. 1-22: Jonah
- Dec 6-20: Advent
- Jan 3-24: Wise Men and Baptism
- Jan 31-Feb 21: Healing stories
- Feb. 28-March 28: Two greatest commandments
- April 18-May 9: "I Am" statements
- May 16-June 6: Beatitudes.

Training and preparation sessions will be offered. Anyone who is interested in taking a session should contact Susan Bastardo.



Mark your calendars - Youth Groups will meet on Saturday, September 6th at 4:30 p.m. at the church. Watch your mailboxes, a letter will follow with complete details. See you then.

Regular meetings will begin on Sunday, September 14th. 7th and 8th graders are welcome to join our Juniors meeting 4:00—5:30 p.m. each Sunday and 9th -12th graders are welcome to join Seniors as they meet each Sunday from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Parents will be meeting at 5:30 p.m. on the 7th and a schedule for September—December will be shared

then. Any questions please contact Lori Churchill at [Ichurchill@mac.com](mailto:Ichurchill@mac.com). Thanks!



#### **WorkCamp Update**

Our annual WorkCamp trip took us to Manassas, VA, the week of July 13, 2008. 7 teens and 4 adults partook in this awesome experience where we worked with local children (underprivileged and disabled) in summer camps. We will share pictures in a slideshow at a later date to be determined, but if you see Lori or Andrew Churchill, Dave or DJ Hutchins, Mark or Katy Apholt, Anna Lindfors, Amy Seligman, Erica Rayworth, Julia Barry or Laura Caswell, make sure to ask all about it!

#### **WorkCamp 2009**

Yes, we are already signing up for our next trip! We had the opportunity to sign up "early bird registration" and since the kids this year were so excited, we decided to go this route. What this means is that we have slots reserved, and if we fill them, that's great, and if not, we're not penalized because we haven't put down any deposits yet, but since slots fill fast, this seemed the best way to go. One note - all the adults from this year's trip were so touched by the opportunity to do mission with our children (or in Laura's case, to watch us do mission with our kids, which she was really impressed by). So as you scan the opportunities, please consider attending with your child. It is an amazing experience.

10-12 year olds - community service mission project in York, PA July 12-17, 2009.

12-20 year olds - community service mission project in Loveland, CO July 26-31, 2009.

Cost per person for either trip is \$252, with a \$50 deposit due by September 28th. Additional expenses include airfare for the CO trip and van rental/gas for the PA trip. We have several

fundraising efforts planned to help with costs and scholarships are available. I will have a meeting Sunday, September 28th after the 10:00 a.m. service to answer any questions. If you have questions before then, email me at lchurchill@mac.com and I can send you links to the WorkCamp website for more information. Sign up in the Narthex.



## Mission Matters

### ...Notes from your Mission Team

Well, we're all back, and ready for fall. The Mission Committee ends the summer with three announcements.

The first is the formation of a subcommittee that will be responsible for our El Salvador initiative. We are extremely fortunate that Kathy Diehl, a very active and articulate member of the St. Francis family has agreed to chair it. Kathy will be pulling together a group consisting of veterans of the 2007 trip, prospective trippers for next February, and others who are simply interested in the project. Together, they'll do the planning and raise the awareness that will keep us all involved and up to date.

The second announcement is more mundane, but, still, important. The Mission Committee will meet on Wednesday, September 10th after the 7:00 p.m. Eucharist. Anyone interested in participating is welcome and anyone with ideas about project should submit them. For more information call Jim Bourque at 508-829-9275 or email jbourque66@verizon.net.



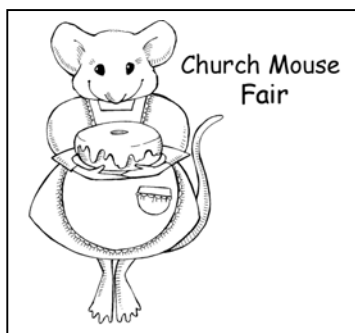
The third announcement is an invitation. Following the 7:00 p.m. Eucharist the next Wednesday, September 24th, we will have the opportunity to meet Jesse Zinc, a Missioner from the Diocese who has spent time recently in Africa. Over dessert and coffee, we'll have a chance to hear about Jesse's experience in the wider church community.



There were 2 shawls blessed last month. Thank you to our contributors.

PS4FS News. This month 35 new families have been added. This number is smaller than when this mission was first started but it is still very daunting. We have now reached a total of 185 groups involved and the current number of shawls mailed out has reached 1,440. Another milestone.

Finally, a group from NJ have been offered a truckload of FREE yarn donated by Michael's Craft Store. I have today placed a request for any yarn they can spare us. Please let me (Beryl Turner) know if you are willing to choose some of this yarn and make a prayer shawl for this very worthy cause. Thank you all so much for your interest.

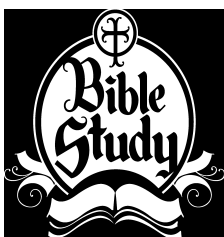


### **"Listen My Children and You Shall Hear" .....of the 2008 Edition of the Church Mouse Fair!!!**

This year's Chairperson, Donna Alarie, is currently planning for another successful CHURCH MOUSE FAIR TO BE HELD ON SATURDAY, OCTOBER 25TH. She is eager to hear from YOU if you wish to be involved in any part of the Fair's many projects. Have you been setting aside some articles for the ATTIC TREASURES ROOM? Have you come across a new recipe that would be "just right" for the BAKE TABLE? Is your family at the point of parting with some good, clean, used toys, books, CD's

and DVD's? Are you thinking of sprucing up your home as the Fall season arrives? If so, please remember that someone may be looking for just what you are replacing. Please remember that we cannot accept tires, cribs, bikes, television sets, computers, encyclopedias, textbooks, subscription magazines or any hard-covered books because of recycling regulations.

Your help is needed and will be most appreciated. Please remember Aesop's words: "NO ACT OF KINDNESS, NO MATTER HOW SMALL...IS EVER WASTED." For more information, please call Donna Alarie at 508-886-6031 (home phone) or 508-847-8574 (cell phone) or you may email Donna at [donnachesspals@aol.com](mailto:donnachesspals@aol.com) THANK YOU!!!



*This fall the Rector will lead a twelve-week study on Sunday afternoons open to all who have a desire to deepen their critical understanding of the Biblical narrative. The class will be divided into three sections that will stand independently from each other: Old Testament (six weeks), Gospels (4 weeks) and St. Paul (2 weeks). If you commit to one section the hope is that you try (with God's help) to attend all or at least most of those classes in that section, but because the three components will stand independently from each other, you can do the Gospels but not the Old Testament, or if you just want to tackle Paul in December that is alright as well. The whole "plan"*

*is outlined below so that some might consider this as a twelve-week study, after which you should have a good sense of how the Bible as a whole fits together.*

**Bible 101- A: A Critical Introduction to the Old Testament (Led by the Rector)  
Sunday Afternoons at 1:30 PM**

*This six-week class will meet at St. Clare House on Sunday afternoons from 1:30 PM to 3 PM beginning on Sunday, September 21 and continuing through November 2. (We will not meet on Columbus Day weekend.) This is both for beginners and those who wish to make a new beginning. While there is no way to cover the entire Old Testament in six weeks, our goal is to introduce some of the major themes and concepts by exploring particular texts along the way.*

- September 21: The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Genesis)
- September 28: Let My People Go: Forty Years in the Sinai Desert (Exodus)
- October 5: Why Can't We Be Like the Other Nations? (First and Second Samuel)
- October 12: *No Meeting (Columbus Day Weekend)*
- October 19: Thus Saith the Lord: The Pre-Exilic Prophets (Amos)
- October 26: By the Waters of Babylon: Stages of Grief on the Way to Hope (Lamentations and 2<sup>nd</sup> Isaiah)
- November 2: Homecoming: Post-Exilic Faith(s) (Ezra/Nehemiah; Ruth/Jonah; Daniel; Ecclesiastes)

**The deadline for the next Little Portion is  
Thursday, September 18<sup>th</sup>**

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](mailto:stfran@verizon.net).

The Little Portion will be mailed on Thursday, September 25<sup>th</sup>.



Saturday, November 1st, at 5:00 p.m. and Sunday, November 2nd, at 10:00 a.m. are designated for baptisms this fall. If you are interested in scheduling a baptism on either of these dates please contact the church office for information and baptism forms.



The Red Cross will be holding a Blood Drive here at St. Francis on Monday, September 22nd from 1:00—7:00 p.m.

Mary Lindfors, our parish nurse will be coordinating with the Red Cross and will be looking for volunteers.

Watch for the sign up sheets on the table in the narthex.

*Dear St. Francis family,*

*Many, many thanks for all your prayers, telephone calls, and visits during my recent illness and hospitalization.*

*With appreciation,  
Allen Beck and family*

### **Basic Safe Church Training**

Canon Sarah Shofstall will present a Basic Safe Church Training course on Saturday, October 4, 2008 from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. at All Saints Church in Worcester. The workshop covers material concerning the protection of children, and also focuses on issues in the workplace. This training session is open to all clergy and church employees (lay, ordained, employee and volunteer). Clergy who are new to the Diocese and those who attended safe church training more than three years ago should plan to attend. Lunch will be provided. Please register by calling 413-737-4786, ext. 18, and mailing a check for \$25.00 to the Diocesan Office (make payable to *The Diocese of Western Mass*). Registration deadline is **Friday, September 26, 2008**. The fee after September 26<sup>th</sup> will be \$45.00.