

E-Portion ~ January 2008

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**God willing,  
The Rt. Rev. Gordon P. Scruton  
will ordain  
Jill Williams  
to the sacred order of Priests  
at  
St. Francis Episcopal Church  
70 Highland Street  
Holden, MA 01520  
on  
Saturday, January 26, 2008 at 5:00 p.m.  
Reception to follow**

*The Bishop and Standing committee request the honor of your presence.*

**From the Rector**

Ten years ago my family and I moved from Connecticut to Holden and on February 1, 1998, I began my ministry as the fifth rector of St. Francis Church. It has been an interesting ride so far!

Our diocesan policy for Clergy Study Leaves is that clergy are expected to take three-months for reflection and refreshment after every five years of ministry. In 2003, while in the midst of pursuing the Doctorate in Ministry degree at Columbia Theological Seminary, I used my sabbatical time to further those studies along. That meant that it was a fairly structured and “academic” time distinct from the daily work of parish life. Five years later, I anticipate a rather different sabbatical—one that I expect will be more relaxed and less structured than in 2003 and therefore truly allow for “reflection and refreshment.”

Easter comes early this year—on March 23. The following Saturday night, at the 5 o’clock service, we’ll have an opportunity as a parish to celebrate the past ten years of ministry we have shared together. And then on April 1, 2008, I’ll begin my time away. At the end of this three-month study

leave, we'll take some vacation time with extended family in North Carolina, and then I'll be back at St. Francis to officiate at a mid-July wedding.

As I prepare for this time apart, I do so in full confidence that St. Francis will be in very good hands. As you will see on the cover of this issue of *The Little Portion*, the Rev. Jill Williams will be ordained to the priesthood in just a few weeks—on January 26, 2008. As we move through the Lenten season, she will continue to grow as a new priest and as a pastor in this congregation. With the generous support of the numerous retired clergy who are members of our parish, Jill will provide coverage in worship and pastoral care for the time that I am away. In addition to that clergy leadership, as always, St. Francis remains in the capable hands of our dedicated staff and wardens.

My plans remain somewhat open at this point—which reflects my desire that it truly be reflective and refreshing. I plan to spend more time with family, including some weekends away with Graham to visit colleges. And I will spend some time in prayer with the brothers at the Society of St. John the Evangelist. While I anticipate doing a fair amount of reading (and I hope some writing as well), I want to move in different directions and at a more leisurely pace than in 2003. It is also my hope to spend some time in Scotland, particularly St. Andrews (where Hathy and I met twenty-five years ago, and where I began to hear a call to ordained ministry) and at Iona, one of the places where Celtic spirituality has its roots.

Even as I celebrate a decade at St. Francis, I will also be reflecting on twenty years of ordained ministry—five as a United Methodist pastor in campus ministry, and the past fifteen years as an Episcopal priest in parish ministry. (I'll also celebrate my forty-fifth birthday!) While none of us can number even the hairs on our head, or control what tomorrow brings, if I were to retire at age sixty-five that would suggest that I am exactly half-way through the active phase of my work as a priest. This study leave, then, comes at an opportune time for me, and gives me a chance to reconnect with my sense of vocation and to begin to ponder what the next twenty years may bring. Only God knows, of course—but this time provides a space for more prayer and reflection than most work weeks allow for.

I get asked more often these days about what my own next steps are and when I will think about leaving St. Francis; I am not always clear about whether I am being nudged along or encouraged to stay! My answer is always the same: I do not know; only God knows. That is an honest answer. What I can say is that both of our kids, who arrived in Holden as little boys, will be at Wachusett Regional High School in the fall: Graham as a senior and James as a freshman. Our diocesan policy asks clergy to commit to at least one year back in the parish after taking study leaves, but I anticipate being around much longer than that, and I hope *at least* to be rector of St. Francis until James graduates from high school. It is impossible for me to know from this vantage point what might come to pass beyond then.

Our current senior warden, Robin Carlo, will complete four years of service at the end of this month. When I have sought her counsel over these past four years about various matters (e.g. agreeing to serve as chaplain to the Holden Police Department or on Diocesan Council) she often responds with a grin by asking, “so what’s in this for St. Francis?” While I have always felt cared for by the people of St. Francis, and Robin is (mostly) kidding, it is nevertheless a fair question. *Why is my sabbatical good for St. Francis?*

When a parish embarks on a search process as St. Francis did more than eleven years ago, the expressed hope on both sides is usually that a long-term relationship will emerge. The reality, however, is that there are not a lot of matches that are able to celebrate ten-year anniversaries these days. (In fact, of the sixty-eight congregations in the diocese you can count on one hand the rectors who have been serving their parishes longer than I have been at St. Francis.) Longer term ministries require intentionality, and a desire to remain open to God’s Spirit, rather than falling into ruts. (One of the books on my reading list will be an Alban book entitled *In It For the Long Haul: Building Effective Long-Term Pastorates.*)

Part of my plan, therefore, is to reflect and pray about where God is leading us in the next chapter of our life together, and I invite all of you to enter into that time of prayer as well. Not too long after I arrived at St. Francis, we embarked on a process together called “Discerning Your Congregation’s Future.” That eventually led us to set some short and long-term goals that were intended to help us look about five years down the road. Then in 2003, we went through a shorter version of that process that led us to revise our mission and vision statements and set some new goals. My hope is that we might embark on a similar process again in the fall 2008. While I am not a big believer in “strategic plans,” I do believe it is important to rekindle the vision—and to check in to make sure

the vision is still a shared one—and one also that begins to include the many new families who have come to St. Francis in the past five or ten years. Several friends of mine have taken sabbaticals in the past year and they said the one part they didn't plan for was re-entry. I want to consider that, and while July and August are somewhat quiet in Holden, my hope is that in September we will be able to reflect together on these larger missional questions, by stepping back and pondering the work God now gives us to do together.

So I see this study leave as a gift, certainly for me as a priest, but also for us as a community of faith. It offers us an opportune time to make some adjustments together about what it is we feel God has called us to do as “all the ministers” of St. Francis Church—and to set some goals that will carry us forward for the next four years. Ultimately that future is, as always, in God's hands. But our work is to listen to where God is leading us, and with God's help take steps in that direction.

Peace,  
Rich

### **Stewardship Update**

On behalf of the stewardship committee, I want to thank everyone who has pledged for 2008. We have \$304,704 pledged from 153 families. Each year I am touched by the parish's response to God's call in our lives.

Thanks,  
Laura Caswell  
Stewardship Chair

### **Mission Matters**

In addition to our usual commitments to the pantry and Mustard Seed, January will feature a major effort at the annual meeting on January 27 to explain and explore the trip to El Salvador. We will have a PowerPoint presentation after the business portion of the meeting, followed by a chance to talk informally about the experience. Plan to be at there, for all the usual reasons and this special one, as well

At a meeting of the Mission Committee on January 2 details of the funding proposal will be presented and action recommended to the Vestry at its meeting on January 9. Those details will be shared with the parish on January 27, as well.

**All Parish Budget Meeting:** Sunday, January 6, 2008 immediately following the 10:00 a.m. service. Please join us.

### **Reflections on Prayer**

*The rector developed the following handout to share with those who participated in this year's Advent Quiet Day. Others may also find it to be helpful.*

When two people are in love and want to spend time together, there is no formula that works for everyone. You discover what works in relationship. Some will want to sit and talk over a candlelight dinner while others will go mountain biking. Some people like to plan ahead and others prefer spontaneity.

Prayer is about being with God, and here too there is not one “right” way. The challenge is discovering your way to spend time with God in ways that are life-giving and bear fruit. The tradition distinguishes between two different spiritual paths sometimes called the kataphatic way and the apophatic way.

**Kataphatic** spiritual practices (sometimes also called the *via affirmativa*) focus on images, symbols and sensations. A deeper realization of God is sought through visions, feelings, imagery, or words. One ancient kataphatic approach is lectio divina: listening to the words of a text to hear a Word of God addressed to us in our time and place. St. Francis of Assisi used scripture to try to visualize what

it was like, for example, to be present at Christ's birth and so one of the gifts he gave us was the image of the crèche. Likewise, the Way of the Cross in Lent and Easter is a Franciscan discipline.

The **apophatic** approach (sometimes called the *via negativa*) begins with gaining some clarity around what God is *not*. Because God lies behind (or beyond, or beneath) our sensory and intellectual ways of knowing, God is beyond all of our images and all of our language. Zen Buddhism speaks of emptying of the self for example. While less developed in western Christianity than in the east, it is probably more common among Episcopalians than Baptists. It is the approach of mystics like John of the Cross and Meister Eckhart and also I think a familiar way for Quakers as well. Use this time in ways that work for you. Or perhaps today is a day to give yourself permission to try something new. You might just be still and aware of your breathing. However you come to the quiet time know God is already with you and at work.

**Lectio Divina** is just a fancy way to say "divine reading" (or holy reading) in Latin. It is about "reading, marking, learning, and inwardly digesting Holy Scripture." While it involves our minds, it is an invitation not to simply "understand" the text but to *pray* it, trusting that God has a word for us. It is therefore different usually than most Bible studies. Origen advised Christians at the dawn of the third century to read scripture with attention, constancy, and prayer. That is a pretty good definition of what lectio is trying to get at.

Again, there is not one right way to do this. But classically, *lectio divina* includes four movements:

*Lectio*: read the passage carefully, and slowly, several times;

*Meditation*: meditate on this passage as it pertains to your own life at this time; don't worry so much about what it meant two thousand years ago but ask what it might be saying to you today;

*Oratio*: open your heart to God;

*Contemplation*: listen to God...

## Coming in Lent.....

### **The Parables of Jesus ~ Tuesdays at 7:00 p.m., with the Rector**

February 12 ~ The Vineyard Owner and His Workers: Matthew 20:1-16

February 19 ~ The Talents: Matthew 25:14-30

February 26 ~ The Mustard Seed: Mark 4:30-32

March 4 ~ The Great Banquet: Luke 14:15-24

March 11 ~ The Compassionate Samaritan: Luke 10:25-37

### **The deadline for the next Little Portion is Thursday, January 17th**

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, January 24th.

Call to the Annual Meeting of  
St. Francis Episcopal Church  
70 Highland Street  
Holden, Massachusetts

Sunday, January 20th  
Immediately following  
the 10:00 a.m.  
Service of Holy Eucharist

## **Vestry Officers**

*The following slate of officers will be presented at Annual Meeting on Sunday, January 21st, to be elected to one (1) year terms.*

### **Senior Warden: Chris Berglund**

Chris and his wife Judy joined St. Francis in 1994 when they moved to West Boylston. Their daughter, Kyle Emma, was baptized that same year. Prior to serving the past two years as Junior Warden, Chris served one term on Vestry. While on the Vestry, he served as liaison to the Finance Committee and the Stewardship Committee at different times. For the last four years, Chris has served on the Audit Committee. St. Francis is a vibrant, mission-directed community comprised of a diverse congregation that is continually stimulated by the broad range of ideas, energies and gifts provided by its members. Chris is grateful for the opportunity to further serve the St. Francis community.

### **Junior Warden: Laura Caswell**

Laura has been attending St Francis since 1991. She has taught church school, overseen the acolyte ministry, helped with the senior luncheon a number of times, been a member of the stewardship committee since 2001, has been chair the last 3 years and is currently on the vestry. She is always amazed at the youth of the parish and is grateful that her children such had a nurturing place to grow. Laura has seen St Francis change and grow over the years along with her personal spiritual growth. She looks forward to serving St Francis and meeting the challenges of the next years.

### **Clerk: Dawn Rooke**

Brian, Dawn and their three children, Kiersten (19), Connor (18), and Jonathan (15) have lived in Holden for 18 years and have attended St. Francis for 16 years. They feel blessed to have been able to raise their children in this wonderful church that places such a strong emphasis on supporting, nurturing and honoring its youth. During these years Dawn has been involved with the "Meal Connection", the Newcomer Committee and has served four years on the vestry. Serving as vestry clerk has been an honor and she looks forward to continuing in the coming year.

### **Treasurer: Sandra Kimball**

Sandra Flynn Kimball has been at St. Francis for a little over 5 years. She and her husband Doug have two children Lauren, 9 and Ethan, 7. She is a life-long Episcopalian, raised in The Church of the Good Shepherd in Clinton. At St. Francis she has been a church school teacher. She is very much looking forward to continuing to share what God has given to her as she continues to serve as our treasurer. Sandy is a Certified Public Accountant with a BA from Tufts University and a Masters of Science in Accountancy from Bentley College. She has nearly 15 years of experience in corporate finance, currently serving as AVP of Investment Accounting for The Hanover Insurance Group in Worcester.

## **Vestry:**

*The following list of names will be presented to serve a three (3) year term. [3 persons to be elected.]*

### **Bryan Diehl**

Bryan and his wife Kathy, with their sons Bryan and David, moved to Holden in 1998. They have attended St Francis for five years. During that time Bryan served a one-year term on vestry and has been on the property committee for three years. He also sings in the choir and is honored to have been nominated to serve on vestry again.

### **PJ Mann**

PJ and his family, wife - Donna, kids – Peter, Abigail, and Hilary, have been attending St Francis for just over a year after relocating to the area from Philadelphia. We have been thrilled by the community and fellowship we have found in our new church home. PJ works for Shire Pharmaceuticals as Director of Validation and is excited to have been nominated to serve on the vestry of St. Francis and to have the opportunity to further serve in the ministries of the church.

### **Dianne Thibeault**

Dan, Dianne, and their two children, Danny (21) and Julianna (17) have lived in Holden for 17 yrs. Soon after moving here, they began attending St. Francis Church. Dianne has taught Sunday school and been involved with the annual Mouse Fair. Currently she is serving as co-chair of the Alter Guild. She is thankful for the wonderful support and religion opportunities the St Francis community has given her and her family through the year. Dianne is honored to have been asked to serve on the vestry.

### **Diocesan Convention Delegate**

*This year we will elect one person to a three (3) year position as lay delegate to Diocesan Convention.*

**Peter Caswell** is eligible for re-election to a second term.

Peter joined St. Francis with his family in 1991, after mentioning to a friend that the family was looking for a new church and being invited to "try us out". He's served as a Lay Eucharist Minister for the past seven years and Delegate to the Convention for the last 3. Over time at St. Francis, Peter has also served in the Vestry, helped out with Youth Group, served on committees dealing with church growth and reconfiguration of our worship space. He is grateful that our parish gives him the opportunity to serve through the Convention each year.

### **Bookkeeper: (appointed) Virginia Brink**

Ginny has been an Episcopalian all her life. She and her husband Jerry have been members of St. Francis for 18 years. Prior to that they attended St. John's in Worcester where their two sons were confirmed. At St. Francis she has previously been involved by singing in the choir, by serving as Treasurer, and as a member of the finance and audit committees. She is currently retired after working at several Worcester area companies and non-profits. Several years ago Ginny and her husband moved to a condo in West Boylston after living in Holden for 32 years.

*Please note:* The position of "Assistant Treasurer" previously held by Jane Howell included service on vestry. Beginning this year that position will become a bookkeeper position that Ginny Brink has graciously agreed to fill as a non-stipending position. The bookkeeper, however, will no longer be a member of the vestry.

### **Basic Responsibilities of the Vestry**

The responsibility of the Vestry, like that of the governing body of any organization, is to:

- + Help define and articulate the mission of the congregation;
- + Support the mission by word and deed;
- + Select the rector;
- + Ensure effective organization and planning;
- + Ensure adequate resources in leadership and in financial stewardship;
- + Manage resources effectively;
- + Determine that appropriate programs, policies, and procedures have been developed and are followed;
- + Assess its own performance.

Though the Vestry has some similarities to a board of directors, it is important to remember that this ministry of leadership is exercised in the church. The success of a congregation is not measured in terms of numbers of members or size of the endowment, but rather in the degree to which it is working toward the fulfillment of the mission of the Church.

*From "What Is A Vestry/" Publication of Cornerstone, Episcopal Church Foundation*

**Reports for the Annual Meeting Booklet** need to be into the office by **Wednesday, January 9th.**

If you have access to a computer and email, please email your report to [stfran@verizon.net](mailto:stfran@verizon.net) Otherwise, please leave them in the office mail box located in Fellowship Hall. Thanks.