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**Rector's Notes for May 2007**

As I sit down to write this article I am still trying to process the killings that took place at Virginia Tech University this month. Each of us will do that at our own pace and in our own ways; events like this stir up so many emotions within us. But as we move forward, what can we say and do as people of faith in the face of such violence? I don't have any easy answers. But what follow are several random thoughts that may help to spark further reflections within and among you who read these notes.

- 1. We can pray.** When we don't have the words, we can remember what St. Paul told the church in Rome—that the Spirit is already interceding for us in and through our sighs. We can pray for the victims and their families, remembering that the victims are not only those who died but also all those who are students and faculty and staff at Virginia Tech for whom this has been a traumatic experience. As Christians we must also pray for the troubled young man who did the killing, and for his family. That is not easy; but Jesus leaves us no wiggle room to get out of that. I think we also need to learn to pray not only with words of intercession but as people who find ways to keep ourselves centered on the love of God made known in Jesus Christ. Centering prayer, and/or meditation—simply being still and knowing God is God (and we are not)—is an important aspect of self-care in troubled times. We can and must remember to breathe, knowing that to do so is a form of prayer.
- 2. We can open our hearts to all who suffer, not simply those whose stories are reported by the media.** The shootings in Blacksburg represent a terrible tragedy. But the death toll in Bagdad (American *and* Iraqi deaths) continues to mount and the same day as this tragedy there were far more deaths in Iraq. Yet we seem to be a people who don't want to hear about it. Nor do we hear much about the killing in Darfur. I don't mean to suggest that we ignore or minimize the tragedy at Virginia Tech; but rather that it can be an opportunity to open our hearts to the suffering of God's children everywhere—not only those whose stories are reported by the news media.
- 3. We can become more aware about mental illness and work toward an improved health care system that provides care for all who suffer.** Every person I know who is involved in offering care for those who suffer from mental illness tells me the system is broken and getting worse. There is still much about mental health that we do not understand, to be sure. But there are numerous ways that we can, and must improve our health care system. Closer to home, we can become aware of the signs of depression and anxiety—not as a way to make judgments but as a way to identify the places where persons are crying out for help. There is help available and pro-active ways that can lead us toward healthier and safer communities.
- 4. We can work toward non-violent ways of resolving conflict, and teaching these ways to our children and our children's children.** We have to find ways to live the Prayer of St. Francis—to become instruments of peace. In a violent and polarized world this is not easy work, but our lives depend upon it. I have preached this message for my entire ordained life. I don't pretend that I am always able to live it but with God's help I continue to try. We live in an extremely polarized society and whenever we fall into black and white ways of seeing ourselves and others we block out God's Holy and life giving Spirit. We harden our hearts. To resolve conflicts in non-violent ways is to begin to create a society where at every level—in our homes, churches, schools, and political systems—we sit down at the table with this prayer on our lips: “Lord, make me a channel of your peace...”
- 5. We can avoid bad theology.** The Incarnation is central to my beliefs about God: I believe that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ, neither height nor depth nor anything else. God is with us—even in the darkest hours of life's journey. But God-with-us is not the same as God who controls every human action. It is too easy (and quite frankly awful theology) to blame God for every bad thing that we humans do to one another. Sometimes I think that God's people need to be willing to leave God out of it—which may at first sound like a contradiction to my previous statement. But the fact is that we human beings have been given the irrevocable gift of free will. Every bad thing that happens in the world is not God's fault, nor a part of God's “plan.” God can and will bring good out of all ill, but to ask “why did God do this?” or even “why did God allow this to happen?” is to ask the wrong question.

- 6. We can turn our televisions off.** I am absolutely convinced that in the aftermath of national tragedies that the media does not report the news but exploits victims, perpetrators, and the public. We must learn to “just say no.” This is hard; we crave information. But whether the disaster is 9/11, Hurricane Katrina, or the tragedy at Virginia Tech, the media seems to be insatiable for instant solutions and “lessons” way before all the facts are even known. In the process bad information works its way through the system and viewers are continuously re-traumatized. This is not to blame the media; it is simply to observe that the 24-hour new-cycle is not helpful to thoughtful discourse and processing grief. Take a break; and then read the story from a responsible news source as you feel ready.
- 7. We can choose to live by faith and not fear.** Jesus came into the world that we might have life, and have it more abundantly. It is tempting for us to recoil in fear when something like this happens. Or to think that there is a technical fix—a new policy—that will keep us safe so that this will “never happen again.” The truth is that bad things will happen in our world. But they are not the norm. Most days we can and do walk out of the doors of our homes and go to school or work and carry on the normal challenges of our day-to-day lives. In our anxiety we can begin to think that the world is a terribly dangerous place and that can lead us to despair. We shouldn’t be naïve, and we can be alert. But we can also choose to live by trust in God’s goodness and love. As Christians, we make our song even at the grave: “alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.” This is not to live in denial but rather choose life in the face of death. That is never easy; but we hold hands and walk into the world as Easter people one day at a time; because that is who we are.

Yours in Christ,  
Rich

**Confirmation—Sunday May 6**, at the 10:00 a.m. service

Please pray for those being confirmed and received.

**Confirmed** Christopher Bullock, Andrew Farrar, Lorene Farrar, Scott Farrar, Abigail Goewey, Alexander Heinricher, Kellen Joyce, Donna Mann, PJ Mann, Craig Miller, Jacob Monroe, Griffin Reilly, Graham Simpson, Chelsea Stanovich, Julianna Thibeault, Sarah Trafton, Marjorie Tremblay, and Caitlin Urso.

**Received** Gail Bourque, James Bourque, Julie Mankowsky, Kathleen Nicoll, Mary Jude Pigsley, Ann Scannell, Mary Jane Wilson

**Refresh, Renew, Rejoice! Capital Campaign Moving Full Speed Ahead!**

The parish has been enthusiastic in participating in the information sessions. If you have not attended a session PLEASE COME this weekend. A session will be held after EACH service in the library. BABYSITTING is available to care for your children while you attend. The purpose of these sessions is to give you more detailed information about the worship space renovations, repairs to all three church properties, Memorial Garden improvements and our commitment to tithe from the campaign funds raised. This is the time to meet with the parish members who have been involved in the planning of all aspects and to have your questions answered. WE NEED ALL TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS CAMPAIGN WITH YOUR ENTHUSIASM AS WELL AS YOUR PLEDGE. YOU WILL LEARN MORE ABOUT PLEDGE EXPECTATIONS AT THESE MEETINGS.

Pledges to date : \$140,000 out of \$325,000  
Worship Space Renovations to Begin: May 7, 2007  
(We will worship in Fellowship Hall during renovations)

Kathleen O'Connor, Capital Campaign Committee

**Senior Luncheon “Goes Greek”**

Our seniors and their guests enjoyed Eucharist together then a lovely luncheon of roast lamb cooked Greek style along with rice, grape leaves, humus, baklava and numerous Mediterranean treats. Many helpers deserve applause for their part in creating this annual event to honor our seniors: Joan Balkus, Susan Bastardo, Robin Carlo, Lori Churchill, Kathy Diehl, Karen Heath, Bunny Huddleston, Diane Joyce, Karen Kappas, Chuck Manero, Kathleen O’Connor, Tom Ritacco, Dawn Rooke, Jeanne Schutte, Jen Stanovich and Sarah Trafton.

Thanks to all who attended and all who helped make this a memorable event.

**The Annual Alleluia Fund Golf Tournament** ~ Saturday, May 19<sup>th</sup> at the Southwick Country Club in Southwick. Tee time is 9:30 a.m. sharp. Tournament fee is \$90 per golfer, which includes cart, 18 holes of golf and a hearty dinner. Please sign-up in the narthex.

### **Children's Music Offering**

On Sunday, May 13th (Mother's Day), the church school children will be invited to share a children's anthem during the 10:00 a.m. service. All children in preschool through grade 6 are encouraged to participate. Rehearsals are being held after the 10:00 a.m. service. Questions: Contact Sue Bastardo 508-829-0600

**Coming this summer**.....Wizards and Wonders Vacation Bible School for kids ages 4-12. The program will be offered at St. Francis from July 9-13th and will run from 9 am-3 pm (optional after-care available until 5 pm). The program will also be offered at St. John's Episcopal Church in Worcester from July 30-August 3rd. Sign up for either session soon in the narthex-SPACE IS LIIMITED! Questions? Contact Robin Carlo at rcarlo5@mac.com or at 508 829 0363.

### **Mission Matters**

Thank you for your generous support.

- for our Good Friday offering of \$538 to be sent to support the ministries of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East.
- for supporting the Gift for Life – a water well which will ensure a clean water supply for an entire village – through our Easter offering. Approximately \$2500 has been collected and will be sent to ERD (Episcopal Relief and Development). The Mission Team voted to send the remaining \$2500 (\$5000 need to build one well) from their annual Mission budget.
- for 30 Heart to Heart Kids Kits which will be forwarded to a central distribution point May 11-12.

**Mission Stitchin'** ~ If you haven't picked up your baptismal gown patterns for the Mission table please do so as soon as possible. These gowns offer an incentive for new mothers to bring their babies in to the Haitian Health Foundation for a check up. Collection day for the baptismal gown is the weekend of May 12-13. After they are blessed the gowns will be forwarded to the Foundation in Haiti. For more information call Eleanor Bird at 978-464-5564.

#### **Mission Distributions Made in April**

\$2500 – ERD to complete the building of a water well  
\$500 – Worcester County Food Bank  
\$500 – Centro Las Americas, Worcester  
\$500 – Worcester Common Ground  
\$500 – Abbey House, Worcester  
\$500 – Five Talents

#### **Millennium Development Goals**

If you're interested in learning how we at St. Francis Church have been supporting these goals check out our Mission table display in mid May.

**Coming this Summer** ~ We will be collecting food for the Wachusett Food Pantry. More information next month.

**Don't forget the next Prayer Shawl Meeting** will be Monday, May 21<sup>st</sup> at 10:00 a.m. in Fellowship Hall. Hope to see you there.

**The next Mission Meeting** is Monday, September 10<sup>th</sup>.

# **American Red Cross Blood Drive**

**Eagle Scout Project for Matt DiPinto Troop 12**

**Thursday, May 10, 2007**

**3:00 PM – 8:00 PM**

**Hubbardson Center School Cafeteria**

**8 Elm Street ~ Hubbardston**

To schedule an appointment please call Matt DiPinto (978) 928-5874.  
(Appointments Preferred)

**Dedicated to 5 year old Avery Forrestall, leukemia patient**



Please bring a valid ID and  
drink plenty of fluids before donating.

ALL BLOOD TYPES NEEDED  
Blood Type "O"  
is in Great Need.

To Donate Blood You Must Be At Least 17 Years Of Age, Weigh At Least 110 lbs, Be In Good General Health. Most Medications Are OK.

**The next Little Portion deadline** is Thursday, May 17th.