Dear Bethesda Family,

We are most definitely in the summer months in south Florida, where the pace is at its slowest and the heat and humidity are at their highest. Even though this is normally a more relaxed time of year, the cultural climate in the air right now prevents me from fully experiencing that relaxation. What I feel around me more than anything else right now is fear: fear for safety, fear of the unfamiliar and different, fear of change, fear of the world as we know it fading away. Unfortunately, on top of that, we are acting and reacting out of that fear in destructive and unjust ways—at worst with shooting sprees and absurd legislative initiatives and at best with unfounded suspicion or contempt of neighbors and nearby strangers simply because they are different. I do not believe that any one of us is immune to these fear-based reactions, benign though ours may seem.

Nonetheless, our faith calls us to live differently. While I don’t think we can reasonably expect never to experience fear in our life, we believe that the love of God, present within us through his indwelling Holy Spirit casts out fear and is a far greater force to transform our life. In other words, fear be damned, we followers of Jesus must not act out of fear or base our treatment of others on fear—even if that fear is well-founded and realistic. Yes, I think often our fears of others are unreasonable and based simply on our long-standing biases and prejudices that each and every one of us carries from generation to generation. But even when we face a very real threat to our safety or merely our mythical way of life, we as Christians, even in those situations, must choose to follow God’s sense of right, God’s vision of justice, God’s call to compassionate love.

I believe this call even extends to our political process and to voting. Our faith tells us that the very best possibility for us to know deep in our souls the peace of God that passes understanding comes from seeking that peace for others and resisting every temptation to act in our own self-interest. This represents one of the most blissfully beautiful ironies of our faith: that to truly find ourselves, we must deny ourselves—our preferences, our comfort, our safety—and put others first. Jesus actually even goes further and says that of those others, the ones who should get preference, are those most vulnerable, the ones not in power, the ones who are despised and rejected by polite society. So if we endeavor to look at society through a Gospel lens, we will understand that our society is only as just and effective as it is for the least: for those who endure racism, sexism, homophobia, and other discrimination; those whose lives are in danger simply by doing their job; those who do not know where their next meal will come from; those who have simply been abandoned and forgotten by society. We cannot be the ones who look past those who suffer, assuming they deserve it or simply expecting that they had the same chance at life that you and I had. Our faith calls us to act, to proactively choose what is best for the least among us when we have a choice. And I ask that each of us turn off the biting and, frankly, dishonest political rhetoric over the next three months and pray. Pray that we will know God’s love and not fear. Pray for the grace to deny ourselves and seek good for others. Pray about how best to build a truly just and compassionate society. And let’s let our Gospel concerns direct our choices on election day.

(Continue on the back)
**Wednesday Evenings**

I am so excited to tell you that we are launching our Wednesday Evening Gatherings this fall. Following our program-year calendar, we invite everyone to join us Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m. for a simple meal, followed by programs for all ages. For adults, we will normally offer three different classes/discussions each week, and we will always have fun programs for young people (who can also simply take that time to do homework if need be). We will end the evening in prayer together, either in the chancel or the Garden Chapel, and be heading home by 8:00 p.m. So in just two hours each week, we have the opportunity to have a meal and fellowship together, to learn, and to worship. The schedule will be up on the website soon, and will also be in the Fall Catalog that Renée Boger-Cheifet, our Communications Coordinator, is putting together for availability this month.

**Prayer and Spirituality**

Many people have said to me in my time here that they would love to learn more about prayer and to experience a deeper spiritual life. They have asked if I would consider doing some teaching and sharing my own experiences of prayer. I am going to lead a two-week discussion on our first two Wednesday evenings about prayer in our busy lives. I am also offering to lead a monthly group to talk about prayer and practice some new ways of experiencing the clear and strong presence of God in prayer. Anyone interested in being a part of this group should let Father Burl know so that we can gauge interest in it and find the best time each month to meet.

**Parking**

Our work to ameliorate our parking issues continues to go well. Tanner Rose, our Junior Warden, and Fred Staley, our Associate for Administration, are leading that effort and have an update for us that is attached to this letter.

**Stewardship**

We’ve decided to adjust our timeline for the annual campaign next year in an effort to have more timely commitments and to have the opportunity for fruitful conversation and joyous fellowship during the season. Our plan is to distribute pledge cards after all services in early January. For those of you unable to pick them up then, we will put them in the mail. Then, in late January, we will have a celebration and consecration of our pledges on the same Sunday as our Annual Meeting, as we celebrate our life together in the year gone by and in the year ahead. Having had such positive response to the Garden Chapel Service & Gatherings last year, everyone will have an opportunity to attend again this coming March. Further details about all of this will be available in September. So please keep an eye out for a “save the dates” letter at that time.

**Thanksgiving Services**

The clergy from all the congregations that participate in the Interfaith Thanksgiving service in town had lunch several weeks ago. We discussed our experience that many people are unable to celebrate with us because they have family commitments all Thanksgiving Day. We decided to try this year holding the Interfaith service on the evening before Thanksgiving, as is the custom in many communities across the country. So, the service will be at 6:30 p.m. on Wednesday, November 23. We have the privilege of hosting this year also, so the service is right here, and we hope everyone will come join us for a festive service and warm reception following. This is not necessarily a permanent schedule, but we felt it important to give this a try in an effort to draw people in who are unable to attend Thanksgiving Day. At Bethesda, we will still hold our Thanksgiving Day Eucharist as usual this year.

Peace,

[Signature]

The Rev. James R. Harlan
Rector