Dear Bethesda Family,

One of the aspects of being at Bethesda I find both fascinating and fun is that people have so many different rhythms to their lives and different “relationships” with Palm Beach. A great many here, like me, of course, call Palm Beach home. We have set down roots here and see our lives revolving around the going from and coming back to this beautiful place as our home. Even some people who spend only some months here each year see Palm Beach this way. For others the place they consider home is up north or in the Midwest or across the Atlantic. Palm Beach represents for many a sweet getaway, a retreat, a haven from the hustle and bustle—and the dreary winter weather. Then we have those who pass through here on their travels and grace this place with their presence for one Sunday or several, once in a lifetime, or every year.

In these varying rhythms and relationships, I have discovered an interesting phenomenon. Sometimes folks who head north for several months each year experience a bit of a re-entry disorientation. Now I know no one actually believes this, but sometimes I see reactions that seem to arise from a sense that Bethesda should have just stopped everything the minute they left and should then pick right back up where things were in March or April or May, as if the summer months just don't exist in Palm Beach. To be sure, many organizations in town close up for those months, and at Bethesda we modify our schedule just a bit; however, we are seeing a growing number of parishioners who are here year-round. Bethesda is a lively and joyous place every month of the year, and our leadership intends that we continue to grow in loving worship, learning, service, and stewardship even during those summer months. Furthermore the summer months afford us the time and mental space to do substantive planning and evaluation. During these months, we carry out improvements to our programs and administration.

So, that means that, even as each of us has grown and changed individually over the summer, Bethesda has as well. It means that returning here after being away for an extended period necessarily means experiencing some new aspects to our common life. I actually think this offers a great opportunity for renewal and a fresh experience of God’s loving presence, though people often experience something like dissatisfaction instead. What can make the difference between a rankled return and a holy homecoming?

- I suggest, if you are returning to Bethesda after being away for several months, that you begin praying about your return. Ask God to be filled with grace and gratitude for what you will have the joy to experience. Ask to see and feel the hope, energy, and excitement that God has for this community of faith.

- Second, I suggest that you get on our website, bbts.org, and begin looking through it, especially reading through the catalog that will fill you in on every program we have planned for the year. In addition, if you do not already do so, please begin reading the weekly e-mail blast, as it will give you a more-timely taste of what is happening.

- Finally, get in touch. Give one of us a phone call and catch us up on your life while we catch you up on ours. In doing these things, you will lessen the potential for disorientation and increase the opportunities for connection and renewal.

(Continue on the back)
**Wednesday Evenings**
Wow, has this initiative been transforming. Parishioners and others as many as 75 have been gathering on Wednesday evenings for dinner, programs/classes, and a beautiful, candle-lit service of Compline. Please do make plans to join us whenever you are able on Wednesday evenings, making sure to let us know you are coming by using the form on the website, by calling the office, or by signing the sheet available in the cloister on Sunday mornings. You will find this a great time of renewal, of getting to know your fellow parishioners, and of learning more about our faith and spiritual life.

**Parking**
We continue to work on a viable solution to our parking challenges, refining our proposal, talking with neighbors, and collaborating with the Town staff. Tanner Rose, our Junior Warden, believes we are making good progress and feels hopeful that we will get this problem worked out soon. We will have more detailed updates in the coming months.

**Vestry Retreat**
The Vestry is holding a two-day retreat this month. The Rev. Jim Lemler, Rector of Christ Church, Greenwich, Connecticut, will lead us in some prayerful work about leadership in times of transition, about how to be the Church in our rapidly changing world, and about how to best work together as spiritual leaders for the best interests of Bethesda. Father Lemler will be our guest preacher on Sunday, October 30, so, if you are in town, please plan to come hear him.

**The coming season**
We have so many wonderful programs planned for the season. All of our favorites are gearing up, including our monthly recital and Evensong Sunday evenings, our glorious Christmas Concert and Christmas worship, our Boar’s Head and Yule Log Festival, our Annual Meeting and Picnic, Ash Wednesday and Lenten Wednesday Eucharist and Lunch, Sunday forums, evening classes and Bible studies, and so many others. Our guest preachers this season include the afore-mentioned Rev. Jim Lemler, Rector of Christ Church Greenwich, and Dr. Robert Radtke, President of Episcopal Relief and Development. The Rev. Scott Gunn, Executive Director of Forward Movement and longtime friend of Bethesda, is joining in the spring, as is The Rev. Ed Bacon, retired Rector of All Saints Church, Pasadena, California, who will lead our Lenten Retreat. Bishop Peter Eaton will make his visitation to Bethesda on May 28th.

**Vestry Nominations**
The Vestry Nominating Committee is beginning their work of recruiting and screening a slate of nominees to serve on the Vestry for three-year terms. More information will be out shortly. Please consider who in our parish family might best serve in these important leadership positions and get in touch with Beth Cole or any member of that committee.

I hope this autumn finds you and yours well—and not too caught up in frustration at our crazy election cycle. I know you join me in praying for God’s grace to prevail in our lives and in our common life, in praying for our government whether we agree or disagree with our leaders’ policies at any given time, in praying for all those running for public office, and in praying and working for civility in our society. Most importantly, let us all pray for the grace to live with one another in this community with love and charity, being grateful for our differences, as those very differences are opportunities to experience grace ourselves and to share grace with others.

I look forward to seeing every one of you here this season. Come home soon!

Peace,

The Rev. James R. Harlan
Rector