Dear Bethesda Family,

The Vestry and I have an important invitation to extend to you, to every member of this parish, even to those who are not here much recently.

Did you know that Bethesda's basic Sunday morning schedule has been the same for decades? The last major modification to it was to have Holy Communion every week at the 11:00 a.m. service. Yet over these decades, the world around us, the rhythm of people's lives—especially of households with children—and the spirituality and sense of mission of the Church have undergone tremendous transformation.

It is no surprise, then, that on a weekly basis parishioners will express to the staff, the Vestry, or the clergy some longing for something that they feel is missing on Sunday morning or share a challenge with some aspect of Sunday morning that is not quite working for them. For example, people regularly wish we had more time for fellowship with more substantial food than we have right now as we rush from service to class. Some wish the clergy were more available following services. Others express a wish for more time for Christian Education or for opportunities to get to know people who regularly attend one of the other Sunday services. Some express a wish that the service they attend were shorter and some longer.

For over a year we have been exploring the possibility of adding a service at some other time of the week. We added the Wednesday evening Compline service as part of the Middle Way, which has been received with great joy and gratitude. Nonetheless, the conversation really made evident to us that the questions we are trying to answer are not simple technical questions about service times or liturgy choices. We need to dig deeper into what the longings and challenges are for parishioners as we all share in the life of this community of faith and as we live into our Christian faith in a rapidly changing world. Perhaps, if we can come together and share those longings and challenges, we can see if the way we have Sunday morning organized is the best or if there might be a better way.

So, we are going to have a two-part Town Hall Gathering as follows. Note that you will need to plan to participate following the service you attend, rather than before, because this conversation will last about an hour, and the 10:15 a.m. meeting will overlap the first part of the 11:00 a.m. service. Food is provided.

PART 1, Sunday, April 23, choose the one following the service you plan to attend:
- Sunday, April 23, 10:15 a.m. (light breakfast served)
- Sunday, April 23, 12:15 p.m. (light lunch served)

PART 2, Sunday, May 7, choose the one following the service you plan to attend:
- Sunday, May 7, 10:15 a.m. (light breakfast served)
- Sunday, May 7, 12:15 p.m. (light lunch served) This meeting will also be available to attend online! Contact the church office if you would like to join via the Internet.

OR
- Thursday, May 11, 6:30 p.m. (light dinner served)

Members of the Vestry, staff, and other ministry leaders will help us begin to engage in reflection and discussion about what Sunday mornings (and other times of the week) need to be for a church like Bethesda in the 21st century, in a culture that is less and less supportive of organized religion, and in a setting with more and more other activities and events taking place on Sundays.

Please get in touch if you have any questions. Most importantly please make every effort to attend one meeting of each part of this Town Hall, as this will shape our shared life for the foreseeable future. We look forward to seeing you there!

Peace,

The Rev. James R. Harlan
Rector

Beth Cole
Senior Warden

Barbara Callahan
Worship Committee Chair