Dear Bethesda Family,

Well, the season has certainly come to a close at Bethesda. We have moved to our summer schedule with two services on Sunday instead of three. Sunday School, adult forums, and The Middle Way have ended, and we are gearing up for summer programs and projects.

**Summer Programs**
First, let’s talk about summer programs. Greg Knight has several tremendous offerings for our young people this summer. Our Youth Pilgrimage heads off to Merry Old England on June 6 for a six-day pilgrimage to Canterbury. I have the privilege of being a part of this group and am so excited to share in this experience. This group of 17 pilgrims will walk the Canterbury trail an average of 15 miles each day (carrying all our gear on our backs), filling the entire journey with prayer and reflection. Please keep us in your prayers.

We also will take a group to Kanuga for a week of camp. This magical, Episcopal camp and conference center in Hendersonville, North Carolina, provides strong and nurturing ministry for persons of all ages, but especially for teens. Of course, Vacation Bible School will happen later in the summer. Our Children’s Ministry Team always puts together a week filled with fun and laughter and learning, and I hope every child in our parish (and all their friends!) come join us for that the week of June 26.

We are also planning our regular Summertime Luncheons. We gather once each month in July, August, and September for lunch and to enjoy one another’s company. We will have more details about these soon, and I hope you will join us if you are in town for them.

**Sunday Mornings at Bethesda**
We continue our consideration of Sunday mornings at Bethesda. The response at our town hall meetings was exciting and engaging, though with no clear consensus on how best to structure the morning. The group that has been working on this, ably led by Vestry member Barbara Callahan, continues to look at various options that will best address the primary longings that people articulated: better opportunities for fellowship and food, increased availability of clergy on Sundays, and a more substantive time for education for all ages. We will continue this conversation, and I ask you to keep any eye out for our email blasts for more as this work continues.

**Staff Updates**
Turning our attention to projects, we have some exciting things happening over the next three months. First, we are moving along in our search for an Associate for Outreach and Development. We have had a wonderful response with some tremendous candidates, both lay and ordained. We have had video-conference interviews with the candidates we feel have the right mix of qualifications and experience, and we will be bringing several finalists to Palm Beach for visits and interviews soon. Once the Vestry, Associates, and I have had time to talk prayerfully about this, I will make an appointment and an announcement about it as soon as possible.

We are also reconfiguring our finance and accounting department. Our accounting and bookkeeping will be in the very capable hands of Guideserve, a firm that specializes in top-flight accounting and financial oversight services for churches. We will also bring on a part-time, on-site financial secretary to support their work. Our Finance Subcommittee Chair, Treasurer, and Associate for Administration all believe this will provide us with a level of expertise and experience well beyond what we could have otherwise, while also providing both cost and work efficiencies as well.

**Sabbatical Preparations**
Did you know that an important part of our Anglican heritage is the Christian tradition that thrived in the British Isles for several centuries as the Roman Empire was falling? This Celtic Christian tradition was shaped by some of our best-known saints, like Patrick, Aidan, and Columba, and draws us into a rich, nurturing relationship with God that is broad and welcoming. Some Celtic themes are the essential goodness in every human being, economic and social

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justice, seeing the continuing creation of God through nature, and striving for peace in the world. We have a great deal to learn from it, and I am excited that over the next several months we are going to make this a focus of both our parish programs and of my sabbatical.

Clergy sabbaticals at their best are far more than an extended leave. They provide opportunities for spiritual renewal and growth that enable clergy to stay fresh in their teaching and preaching and to replenish the drive and vision that support healthy pastoral leadership. As I mark the completion of my seventh year at Bethesda, I look forward to a time of learning and praying our Celtic story.

This Celtic experience will offer not just opportunities for renewal for my family and me, but for the entire parish. Beth Cole, our Senior Warden, Bobbie Leek, Paul Coombs, and Don Smith form a Sabbatical Planning Committee that works on a plan to be a source of renewal and spiritual growth for all of us. Under their leadership, we will learn about and experience our Celtic heritage and story together. Through a Celtic retreat this November, led by the Rev. James Reho, a noted Episcopal priest in the Celtic tradition; a three-week adult forum in January; and several other events, we will all have the opportunity to discover this rich part of our spirituality.

I will begin my sabbatical following the Bishop’s visitation and youth confirmation on May 20, 2018. Eli, Hannah, and I will spend the summer in the British Isles; visiting prehistoric and Celtic historic sites and shrines with generous time for quiet and prayer; spending time with local clergy to learn about their ministry and life; and having space to rest and enjoy our time together.

I am most excited to then have an opportunity to share this with all who wish to join in a parish Celtic pilgrimage. Our Sabbatical Planning Committee will join me in leading a Celtic pilgrimage in 2019 to Iona in Scotland and Lindisfarne in northern England. This pilgrimage will begin May 3, 2019 and will be open to all parishioners and friends who wish to join us for a transforming experience of prayer, community, and the beauty of creation.

I am so excited about this plan and eager to share it with each of you over these months.

Are you ready to begin your Celtic journey? Here are two books that offer a great introduction:

- Mary Earle, *Celtic Christian Spirituality: Essential Writings Annotated & Explained*

These and several other books will be available in The Shoppe soon.

**Building Projects**

Two small but important building projects will happen this summer. First, we are updating the flooring in the office areas. The carpeting throughout the north and south wings, choir room, and reception area are long overdue for attention and looking ragged around the edges. We plan to install new carpet in the reception office and Rector’s study, as well as in the north and south wing hallways. In the rest of these areas, we will remove the carpet and refinish the wood floors underneath. This will improve acoustics in the choir room and provide a warmer welcome in the offices.

In addition, we plan to install a movable partition in the Parish Hall so that we can better use this beautiful space, especially on Sunday mornings. One of the longings we hear consistently is for more opportunities for fellowship. Installing this moveable wall will enable us to have a space on Sundays dedicated to fellowship where people can gather to enjoy one another’s company. We also need an additional meeting space several times each week during the season, as well as every Wednesday for the Middle Way. This partition will be of the highest quality, similar those used in hotel ballrooms, and will be as unobtrusive as possible when stored. The Buildings and Grounds Subcommittee, the Finance Subcommittee, and the Vestry have all looked closely at our program needs and options for this partition and have worked hard to offer this great solution.

As I write this, I am once again following several heartbreaking stories of terror attacks. I find myself easily giving in to the fear and the anger that so easily take over when I read and watch these stories. I have to remind myself constantly that fear and anger do not ever bring peace to me or to anyone else. When I pray during these fearful and angry moments, I need to simply be embraced by God and filled with God’s love and delight. You and I will only find peace in this crazy world through immersing ourselves in that love, through prayer and worship, as well as through our actions to be peacemakers to stand up to the hate-mongers who wish to control us and our world through fear and anger. I hope we can be people so filled and transformed by the grace and love of Jesus that the fear and anger are fleeting and the true strength of transforming love abides. Let’s continue to pray for that for ourselves, for one another, and for the world.

Peace be to you, my dear friends,

The Rev. James R. Harlan
Rector