Dear Bethesda Family,

While life certainly slows down in Palm Beach over the summer months, we have been hard at work here at Bethesda with terrific plans for the coming season. As you have probably heard, we have a new Associate for Outreach and Development, Father Thomas Morris. We also have two new part-time staff who are already having a tremendous impact on our day-to-day work here. I encourage you to read more about them on our website and to stop by and meet them when you are in the neighborhood.

**Sunday Morning Conversations: The Results**

The single most significant project at Bethesda for the past several months has been our Sunday morning conversations. A broad and deep examination of our Sunday morning programs has been a part of our strategic plan for some time. Even on the surface, it seems unrealistic to expect that we can do almost exactly what we have been doing for decades and expect it to still be effective in 2017. So, we formed a group of parishioners and staff, led by Vestry member Barbara Callahan, to design and carry out a process to address this strategic need. This group held a series of Sunday Morning Conversations during the Easter season a few months ago, with large and broadly representative participation. We heard several important longings and challenges that came up often.

The overwhelmingly #1 comment from all age groups was...

- Greater opportunity on Sunday morning for fellowship (with good food). People want to get to know each other better.

Following that...

- More time for Christian education, Bible study, spiritual discussion, testimonials.
- Need to attract more younger members, get their participation in the service.
- More personal connection with the clergy. Clergy need to be available during fellowship time.
- A desire for a less congested timetable.
- Shorter services.

After digesting all of this through several meetings and looking at many different approaches to structuring Sunday mornings, we decided to make significant changes to our Sunday mornings, beginning on September 17, when we customarily return to our three-service schedule. We realize that no structure or schedule will perfectly or evenly address all these longings, as well as the desire on the part of some that nothing change at all. For example, while moving to a schedule with two services would clearly be less congested, we believe that we can remove some congestion with the changes and retain our three-service schedule.

**What will be different about Sunday mornings...What will be the same?**

In this letter, I want to draw attention to those parts of Sunday morning that are not changing, specifically the 8:00 and 11:00 a.m. services. In several weeks, you will receive another letter with more details about the 9:00 a.m. service, Christian education, and fellowship that will share the exciting plans we have for those.

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The 8:00 a.m. service: No major changes
The 8:00 a.m. service that begins our Sunday will not change much at all. In an effort to remove some congestion, we will eliminate the announcements at services. We will print in the leaflet those announcements that we would normally say following The Peace and offer a welcome to guests at that time. Establishing a new custom, we will choose a single question about our Anglican/Episcopal tradition and briefly respond to it at that point in the service. Again, we will do this at all three services each week.
The only other noticeable difference at this service will be that not all the clergy will be present, as we will have one of our clergy each week assigned to be a presence in our fellowship and Adult Forum. So, the priest assigned to the Parish Hall will not be in the 8:00 and 9:00 a.m. services and will arrive late to and leave early from the 11:00 a.m. service.

The 11:00 service: Slightly shorter, and the same service we love
The 11:00 a.m. service, like the 8:00 a.m. service, will see little noticeable change. It will continue to alternate between the liturgy for the Holy Eucharist on the first, third, and fifth Sundays and the liturgy for Morning Prayer with Holy Communion on the second and fourth Sundays. The Bethesda Choir will, as always, offer their musical gifts and support to the congregation.
We do plan a couple of alterations to this service with the intent of responding to the longing for shorter services, while also honoring the longing that this service stay much the same. First, we will read two scripture passages instead of three as we have in the past. Second, the communion anthem will begin during the distribution rather than at the end of it. Third, as with the other services, we will not give verbal announcements but will print those in the leaflet/booklet.
Our expectation is that this service will normally end by 12:15 p.m. This is the single most important moment of our week, and the integrity and prayerfulness of this liturgy is more important than doggedly adhering to an arbitrary time limit. Nonetheless, we are taking these appropriate steps to tighten up this service. On special occasions, such as the Bishop’s visitation and during Lent, it will likely be a bit longer simply because those liturgies contain some additional important elements to them.

But wait, there’s more!
I hope we can all look forward with joyful anticipation what God can and will do in our community of faith as we shape a Sunday morning experience that will lead us to God’s presence in fresh and wonderful ways.
I will be back in touch in a few weeks to tell you more about the rest of Sunday morning. In the meantime, make sure to read the weekly E-mail Newsletter, as it also shares these exciting plans with notes from various staff discussing the components of Sunday mornings at Bethesda.
Peace be to you, my dear friends,

The Rev. James R. Harlan
Rector