



The Rev. James R. Harlan
Rector
(561) 655-4555 x101
harlan@bbts.org

Thursday, September 5, 2019

Dear Bethesda Family,

For much of the past year, we have been working to shape an exciting new vision for Bethesda for the next five years and beyond, a vision that will inspire us to grow in our faith even as we deepen our service to others. The destruction wrought by Hurricane Dorian in the Bahamas as this summer draws to a close has cast that vision in a clearer light.

At Bethesda, we seek to experience the clear and strong presence of God through worship, learning, and service. We value beauty—beautiful worship in a beautiful place—but the suffering of our neighbors in the Bahamas reminds us that to follow Christ is to also look outside our own walls. The beauty of our church and the blessings of our community are values we are called to preserve, and at the same time we are called to help those who struggle and suffer, to help to do God’s work in the world. As our community grows stronger, so does our ability to put our generosity into action so that we can care for our neighbors.

We can and must focus on both the short term and the long term, in our own community and in the world outside our walls.

Immediate needs in the Bahamas

Every Sunday in the prayers of the people, we pray for our companion dioceses in the Dominican Republic, Madagascar, the Bahamas, and Haiti. Today, one of those companion dioceses finds itself in great need. On Tuesday afternoon, Bishop Eaton asked churches in our diocese to work together to quickly raise at least \$50,000 to send to Bishop Boyd in the Bahamas. Bishop Eaton says in his appeal that this immediate and direct offering to the Bishop of the Bahamas is, “so that he and the diocesan administration have funds to give direct and immediate help to leaders and people in the Abacos and Grand Bahama. The Bishop can deliver practical help before anyone else, and he can deliver it right to those in the most need.”

This afternoon, the Vestry, meeting in an emergency session, voted to help Bishop Eaton raise the funds he is seeking by pledging to match the first \$50,000 given from throughout the Diocese toward this appeal. The funds will come from the Church Mouse’s reserve funds which have been set aside, not only to take care of Church Mouse emergencies, but also for situations like this. **With this matching gift, our Diocese will be able to send at least \$100,000 to the Bahamas to help meet immediate needs.** Our exceptional contribution to the Bishop’s Bahamas-relief appeal will not affect the bottom line in our operating fund, because the contribution will be offset by a transfer from the Church Mouse. All of us at Bethesda, and especially those who have contributed to the Church Mouse, should feel gratified and heartened that, through Bethesda, we have been able to provide this gift, which will bring comfort to many in the Bahamas who are now suffering so. If you wish to make a contribution to this effort, in addition to your regular giving to Bethesda’s mission and ministry, you may do so by going to our website to give online, calling Turia in the office, or by making a check payable to Bethesda and marking it “Dorian Relief.”

141 South County Road, Palm Beach FL 33480
Phone: (561) 655-4554 | info@bbts.org | www.bbts.org

Immediate needs at Bethesda

Bethesda is a church with many blessings. We are able to provide help to our neighbors in need, we strive for beautiful worship, and we are stewards of a beautiful building. This year, however, costs have risen, as they inexorably do, and revenue has not kept pace. Costs increased in several areas: required upgrades to the health benefits we provide our dedicated staff, Sunday security, our Diocesan assessment, and Sunday hospitality. In addition, we suffered damage from three serious thunderstorms, resulting in over \$100,000 in unplanned costs. Fortunately, we escaped major damage from Hurricane Dorian.

Although we have taken several steps to trim costs, our revenue has not kept pace with expenses. **Close to 70% of our annual expenses are covered by pledges and contributions from our members.** Your increased generosity is needed for us to continue to provide the highest quality worship and programming possible.

A longer-term view

When we look at our budgetary shortages this year and at the enormous need we see this week in the Bahamas, I know that we have the passion, the commitment, the desire, and the vision to build up our congregation and ensure a future where we can face these types of exigencies with calm faithfulness. We can move past our “paying the bills” approach to budgeting and stewardship to a more secure long-term financial footing.

We need our Preservation Endowment to be substantial enough to enable us to respond more nimbly to lightning strikes and other unexpected expenses, to enable us to respond to any hurricane that comes our own way, and to ensure we continue our ministry of presence in this community in the future.

But we also need an outreach reserve fund. Hurricane Dorian will not be the last disaster outside our walls to which we are called to respond. A reserve fund for such occasions will allow us to respond to those in need more quickly and with a greater impact. You will hear more about this as plans are put into place.

We will be talking a lot about stewardship this year because stewardship is opportunity. Stewardship is mission. Stewardship is security. Our church is precious to us not just because it is beautiful, but because with it and from it, we can do so much good in the world. We need to preserve its beauty in the long term as well as the short term, so that we can nurture the kind of community that we have here now that longs to serve the world and to be a means of grace to others.

As we begin our fall programs with the Ministry Fair this Sunday, please make plans to participate fully in our shared life and ministry and be ready to deepen your walk with God. With diverse opportunities to learn both on Sunday mornings and at the Middle Way on Wednesdays, myriad ways to serve those in need, avenues to care for one another, and ways just to enjoy one another’s company, I believe everyone can find just the right path to connect and discover the profound joy we know in our relationship with Jesus Christ.

As we journey together this year, please also be ready to talk and pray and dream about an even larger vision for what we can do as a community now and in the future.

I very much look forward to seeing you all here in the coming months and wish you every blessing.



Peace,
James+