

May 26, 2005

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I understand that some parishioners recently approached the regional Vicar, concerned about what they termed "a lack of priestly presence" in Holy Family Parish. It seems that my living 7.5 miles away at St. Elizabeth Rectory in Acton and the fact that three other priests (two retired) celebrate our daily Masses have led some to think that I'm not present to the parish. I find that strange because in 32 years of ministry, I've never felt more present to or more consumed by the life of a parish than I do now.

Most of you won't be surprised to know that things are different, very different, since the time when Fr. Murray was the pastor of St. Bernard Parish and I was the pastor of Our Lady Help of Christians Parish. One way of putting this is that on October 25, 2004, the number of Catholic people I'm responsible for in Concord just about doubled overnight. The retirement of Fr. Murray and other changes in the area doubled my on-call days at Emerson Hospital. Having been responsible for two nursing homes in Concord, I added a third, but with the help of Kelly Dunn, former director of Health Care Ministry for the archdiocese and now a consultant to our parish, the added responsibility is manageable and pastorally productive. Catholic religious education in Concord did not, in the past, make heavy demands on the pastors. But our joint parish planning of Generations of Faith had foreseen 3 sessions per month for each pastor. Now, I am present for 6. I am fortunate that an increase in deacons (from 2 to 3) has been a great help in celebrating monthly Sunday baptisms and weddings. Once I had been responsible for less than half the Catholic funerals in Concord (St. B had more than OLHC) and now I am responsible for all of them. I'm grateful that Fr. Murray has, on several occasions, come to minister at a wake and/or to celebrate a funeral when I was unable to do so. And I'm grateful to Deacon Al Murphy who has on several occasions taken responsibility for cemetery services in my absence. Where there used to be two Catholic pastors to consider when someone "wanted to see a priest," there is now only one, and he's writing this letter to you.

More pressing, however, than the virtual doubling of my responsibilities is the pressure of merging the two parishes and trying to be attentive to the needs and sensitivities of so many people. The work of every Council, Commission and Committee in the parish has a particular importance in these early days of a new parish and the pastor's role is especially important at this time. Particularly helpful in this process is the willingness of those who have come forward and shared with me personally both their joys and disappointments as we establish Holy Family Parish.

A question some have posed to me, and some to the Vicar, concerns the celebration of daily and weekend Masses. With just two exceptions (an 11:30 Mass about a month ago and the 5:00 Mass this weekend) I have celebrated every Saturday evening/Sunday morning Mass in Holy Family Parish since its opening at the end of October 2004. I celebrated all the Christmas and Easter Masses as well. I see my ministry to the Sunday assembly as my primary ministry as pastor so I'm neither bragging nor complaining about this. As a matter of fact, presiding and preaching at the weekend liturgies is the highpoint of my week and the joy of my ministry. I am looking for weekend assistance, however, because even the things we love the most can become a burden too heavy to bear without respite. Nevertheless, I will be careful in taking on another priest. The weekend liturgy is, for many, THE moment when they connect with the parish community, with the scriptures and with the sacramental life of the church. I will not lightly delegate responsibility for such a ministry and I will be selective in inviting others to assume that responsibility on a regular basis. Nor do I make any apology for wanting to provide the best ministry possible to the people of Holy Family Parish. In addition to looking for assistance in the role of a visiting priest, we are, as you know from the bulletin, in the process of searching for and hiring a full time, lay pastoral associate.

We all already know that the merging of our parishes of origin has meant many changes in how we live, work, worship and grow as a parish. How the pastor relates to such a newly established parish is also going to bear the marks of change. A small group of people from our parish and from neighboring parishes comes to Mass on a daily basis. With the support and strong encouragement of our Parish Pastoral Council and Parish Finance Council and with the willingness of several priests, we are able to continue to afford and offer the option of daily Mass. Not all parishes can do this. I hope that Holy Family Parish will be able to do so for a long time. And I am most grateful to the priests who celebrate those Masses. In addition to freeing me for other responsibilities, they often allow for daily Mass to be celebrated at the usual time when a funeral is to be celebrated later in the morning.

I had hoped to take this weekend off, especially since I have an out-of-town commitment on Saturday, May 28. Some of my plans for coverage did not come through, although Fr. Sean McCarthy will celebrate the Saturday 5:00 Mass. Fr. Murray, once again, has graciously offered to be here for a funeral on Saturday morning, for the Memorial Day Mass on Monday, and for prayers at the civil ceremonies of the day. I will be back here on Sunday morning for the three morning liturgies. And please know that I am pleased to be here! As I wrote above, praying with you on the weekends is the highlight of my week. I will ask you, in return, to pray that I find a priest to assist me, one who will serve you well.

In the meantime, please be assured that I am indeed present to the parish in a variety of ways and times. If you have questions or concerns about my presence, please feel free to address them to me.

The danger in a letter like this is that some will read it and say to themselves, “Fr. Fleming is too busy to help me...” Not the case – and not my message here! Sometimes it takes a while to get my schedule and yours together, but there’s always room for one more!

**Please note, as seen in this week’s bulletin, that the Memorial Day Mass at St. Bernard Cemetery will be celebrated at 10:30 a.m. (and at the church in case of inclement weather). (The regular daily Mass will NOT be celebrated at 7:00 a.m.)**

**Altar servers** have received (or will receive) invitations to a Sunday Sundaes Party to be held on Sunday, June 5, following the 11:30 Mass – please join us!

Sincerely,

Fr. Fleming

P.S.

I’m pleased to announce that our parish web page is up!

Go to: **[www.holyfamilyconcord.org](http://www.holyfamilyconcord.org)**

We’re still in process so let us know your suggestions.