

June 26, 2009

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Do you know the boundaries of our parish? Acton, Carlisle, Bedford, Lincoln, Maynard and Sudbury are the towns that surround us but in many ways we are a parish without borders. We count among our members families and folks who live outside our territorial boundaries and, just as importantly, we reach far beyond our parish borders to meet the needs of others. An insert in today's bulletin is a letter from a young woman from our parish (whose family comes to worship with us from Stow) who called us on us for help in building a library in a small town very far beyond the local towns (check the letter to see how far away!) The generous response of our parish not only established a library for a people who did not have one but that response also broke through barriers and helped extend our parish life far beyond our reach.

At the recent convocation of Boston priests to begin what Pope Benedict XVI has called a *Year for Priests*, Cardinal O'Malley called on priests to "make the diocese your parish." That's his way of asking us not to let our parish boundaries limit our ministry and generous response to the needs of others. In the time of a priest shortage, this is a particularly important reality and challenge for priests to consider and respond to but it's also a challenge to all of us. Our parish is very much part of a larger whole which is the Church of Boston which, in turn, is part of the universal Roman Catholic communion. Sometimes it may be easier for us to identify with our universal connection and the needs of God's people than it is to identify with our relationship to the more local manifestation of the Church, the archdiocese. This is something all parishes in the archdiocese need to study and a concern that I'll continue to bring to our attention and that of our parish leadership as we approach in October the 5th anniversary of the founding of Holy Family Parish.

Here's some information about what's happening in our own parish which I want to bring to your attention.

In January 2009 I wrote a memo to the parish staff, picking up on comments I'd made at staff meetings in the fall of 2008, calling for the staff to do a self-study so that we might

- challenge our own concept of parish staff ministry
- examine the needs of the parish and listen carefully to what the parish is saying
- take stock of the staff's present composition and evaluate what changes in job descriptions and/or in personnel will better serve the people of God.

I have been reporting to the Parish Pastoral Council in broad terms the work the staff has done over the past several months with the assistance of a team from the Danielsen Center at Boston University, a center whose work focuses on the integration of psychology and religion. The team working with us specializes in assisting parishes and religious organizations in structural development.

I had hoped that our work would have been completed at an earlier date this spring but the process, one I did not want to rush, took more time than I anticipated. A few weeks ago the Danielsen team presented its report and recommendations to the parish staff and I am now meeting with the staff, the Parish Pastoral Council, the Parish Finance Council, the Youth Steering Committee, the Faith Formation Commission and the 2018 Group for the purpose of hearing their questions, concerns and recommendations.

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Having heard from these parish leadership groups we will be rewriting some job descriptions and adding to the staff a new position, that of Director of Faith Formation. This reorg will reflect a new plan for assignment of tasks and responsibilities among staff members and for how the staff works and relates internally and with parish ministries.

My position as pastor figures in this process, too, even if not as immediately as others. In October 2010, my first (six year) term as pastor of Holy Family Parish will be completed and at that time I will have been a pastor in Concord for 16 years. Prior to October '10 I will need to decide if I will ask for a second term. My requesting a second term does not guarantee that I will receive it, although the archdiocese is more and more frequently leaving pastors in place even after two terms are completed. At that time (Oct '10) I will be 63 years old and if there is to be another assignment for me before I retire, that might be an opportune time to begin one. At this point, I know neither the archbishop's nor my own mind on this decision. I simply lay the possibilities before you so that you understand where things are.

If I am to have another term at Holy Family Parish I will look forward to working in the reorganization we are planning. Should I be moving on, I will be pleased to leave to my successor a staff organization that I believe will best serve the Catholic community in Concord. The process the staff has undertaken has been important to me as I consider my own future.

As decisions are made I will report them to you here. For those of you who will be away for parts of the summer, these letters can be found on our parish website: **HolyFamilyConcord.org**

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming