

September 9, 2005

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The sun may be shining but the clouds of the anniversary of 9/11/01 and of Katrina hang thick in the air. And only for a while is our attention turned from the continuing tragedy of terrorism's threat and war in Iraq. The human heart, the world's heart and the earth's heart have much to bear this weekend. Again this weekend, and next, we will place baskets at the church doors for those who wish to make contributions to the relief effort through Catholic Charities USA. Some have asked if whether or not this money will be routed through the Archdiocese of Boston. That is not the case. I will send a check directly to the national Catholic Charities office and note that the money is for the post-Katrina relief effort.

On this coming Monday night, our new (and first elected) Parish Pastoral Council will meet and on the agenda will be several items related to hurricane relief. I have been asked by a parishioner to see if the former OLHC rectory on Main Street in West Concord could be used for a year or two as a home for hurricane victims. Before going further with that proposal, I will seek the advice of the PPC and Parish Finance Council. Another proposal is to set up Monument Hall for a few weeks as a collection center for clothing and school supplies. I've also received a request from Meyer Chambers, former director of the Archdiocesan Office for Black Catholics. Meyer's extended family lived in New Orleans and was severely hit by the hurricane. Many of his family (older and younger) are relocating, some in Boston, and Meyer has asked his friends for any financial support they can offer as he tries to organize this family relocation. Still another proposal came from a Concordian looking for a place to have a benefit concert. He and I are talking about the possibility of this taking place in Monument Hall. I look forward to the PPC's counsel in this area and will report our discussion in next week's letter. I know that many want to do something right away, but it's clear that the hurricane victims will need help for a long time, and that allows us to make the best possible plans for a parish response. (With sadness, I just instructed my computer's SpellCheck to "learn" the word Katrina.)

It's a popular myth that, aside from Sunday Mass, parish life grinds to a halt during the summer months. Not so here at Holy Family!

---A group of hard working dedicated parents and teens prepared and ran our week long Vacation Bible School for 60 children - a great success and the beginning of what I'm sure will be an annual event for Holy Family Parish. My thanks to the VBS staff and all their helpers!

---Another group of parents and teens have been working diligently this summer in forming our new approach to Youth Ministry. This has taken much time, much work and the involvement of many people. Soon we'll be inviting you to a meeting to introduce our Youth Ministry program. To paraphrase.... "It takes a parish to minister to its young people!" So we'll be looking for more than just parents of middle and high schoolers - we'll be looking for everyone to participate in how we hand on our faith to the next generation.

---Generations of Faith is about to enter its second year. GoF offers religious education to the WHOLE parish - not just children, and not just children and their parents, but to EVERYONE. Once again I note that "it takes a parish..." If you did not participate in Generations last year, I sincerely hope and pray that you will this year. Our Generations staff has hardly missed a day this summer working on this year's program and I am most grateful for their dedication. Last year's schedule for GoF turned out to be ineffective in that we offered too many times resulting in uneven participation. Our efforts to be more realistic this year met a road block when so many folks wanted the Sunday 4:30 time. With characteristic generosity, the staff went back to work, rescheduled back to two consecutive Sunday offerings per month, and it's our hope now that the schedule meets the community's needs. My thanks to the GoF team for all they have in store for this coming year.

---Part of the church's growth resulting from the sexual abuse scandal is a keenly heightened awareness of the need to provide a safe and secure environment for all, especially our children, in their relationship to parish life and activities. Our parish is blessed with a faithful, hardworking Safety Committee who have spent a good deal of time this summer preparing to help our parish meet archdiocesan standards for safety in parish life. Once again, this is something for the WHOLE parish - not just parents of children. You guessed it: "It takes a parish to make a safe parish..." Watch the bulletin for important dates centered on this important concern. If

you have felt helpless in the face of abuse in the church, participation in these programs is an excellent way to contribute to insuring that such abuse has no chance to occur again.

---At the church doors is a box inviting questions for our Parish Council. Recently an anonymous parishioner wrote, "Please give us back our chapel." I hope the writer does not think that anyone has intentionally deprived the parish of the chapel's use. As you know from previous letters, we have a mold problem in the lower church, especially in the chapel area. Our Parish Buildings and Grounds Commission did not take the summer off - far from it! They have worked hard on remediating the mold and are now about the business of insuring that the mold does not return. This means meetings, proposals, onsite inspections and all the work that comes with caring for a building. My hat's off to this group who so faithfully work to insure the safety and preservation of our sacred space and other parish properties. Soon, the B&G folks will be working on a master plan for using parish properties and proposals for working on the rectory (among other properties) will be a benefit to parish life.

---The Service and Justice Commission has been active in stocking the shelves of our food pantry for reaching out to the hungry. Hunger never takes a vacation, especially for the poor... In addition, S&J conducted a drive over the summer for school supplies to send to the St. Bonaventure Indian Mission and to Sylvia's Haven.

---Our parish St. Vincent de Paul Society has been active all summer responding to calls for assistance from people in our own community. SVDP works quietly and behind the scenes, respecting the confidentiality of those in need and supplying, year 'round, some of the basic things that many of us take for granted.

---Our Spiritual Development Commission is already planning a November Mass to remember all those who have died in the past year. They are also working on special program for developing one's spiritual life - watch the bulletin for dates and details! The Commission has also submitted its budget to the Finance Council for this coming year's activities.

---Over the summer our Events Committee sponsored a picnic and began planning for an International Dinner Dance! They have also been working to plan receptions after all the Masses on our first anniversary weekend, October 23 and 24.

---The Parish Finance Council has also met during the summer months, preparing our new budget and making plans for fund raising and building up our parish treasury. We will be approaching you this fall, as we celebrate the first anniversary of Holy Family Parish, asking for you to contribute to the future of Concord's new Catholic parish community. All of the activities mentioned above rely in one or more ways on parish finances and parish finances rely on - you!

--- And our lectors have been proclaiming the Word, our Eucharistic Ministers have been sharing the Lord's sacramental presence, our altar servers have been serving, our ministers to home bound folks have brought Christ and your greetings to the sick and infirm, the parish musicians have led us in song, babies have been baptized and their parents prepared for the sacrament by the Baptism Preparation Team, the ushers have taken up the collection, the Prayer Line has continued and provided prayerful support, and the Lord has been adored in his Eucharistic Presence on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.

--- A group of dedicated parishioners has been hard at work planning and preparing for our first Parish Pictorial Directory. Pictures will be taken during two weeks in October. Be sure to sign up after any of the Masses!

All of these people have been working all summer long for **YOU!** I hope and pray that you will take every opportunity to enjoy, appreciate and grow from the work they have done. This is how our parish grows and each of us is responsible for that growth. September is a good time for each of us to ask the question, "What have **I** done to help our parish grow?"

Sincerely,  
Fr. Fleming