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From the Clergy Associate for Family Ministries

December Message from the Clergy Associate for Family Ministries

Running for God...

A year ago we were approaching Advent on the heels of Superstorm Sandy. It was natural to follow the theme of spiritual preparedness on the heels of an examination of our own physical preparedness, our own awareness of our disaster readiness.

This year, although the talk of endurance that we engaged after more than two weeks of hunkering down feels far away, the lessons learned are still present, and the theme of endurance, of patient waiting resonates anew.

After one of our youngest parishioners piped up on Sunday in Chapel and asked that we pray for his mommy who was running in the New York Marathon, I got to thinking about the beautiful example of running a marathon sets for children. Patience, endurance, determination, discipline... all qualities required in the life of faith and in the work of loving God and loving others. It is so important for our children to see us engaged in the disciplines of faith, because they follow us in pursuing what we deem important. Where we place our priorities teaches our children to do the same.

Two of my most beloved mentors in life had a poster hanging prominently on the wall in their homes with the following words. These also remind me of the humbling power of teaching and leading by example:

Children Learn What They Live by Dorothy Law Nolte

If a child lives with criticism, he learns to condemn.
If a child lives with hostility, he learns to fight.
If a child lives with ridicule, he learns to be shy.
If a child lives with shame, he learns to feel guilty.

If a child lives with tolerance, he learns to be patient.
If a child lives with encouragement, he learns confidence.
If a child lives with praise, he learns to appreciate.
If a child lives with fairness, he learns justice.
If a child lives with security, he learns to have faith.
If a child lives with approval, he learns to like himself.
If a child lives with acceptance and friendship, he learns to find love in the world.

Our examples are our children's best teachers. There is something so inspiring about the dedication and discipline required to run a marathon. On the way home from church that day I stopped and picked up a copy of the DVD of *Chariots of Fire* from the Ridgewood Library.

Protagonist Eric Liddell runs with missionary zeal—I love the scene when he tells his sister that he knows God put him on the earth for missionary work in China, but also that God made him fast (at running), that when he runs he feels God's pleasure, and that he runs to honor God. So strong is his sense of purpose that when he realizes that one of the qualifying heats for the Olympics is to be held on a Sunday, he refuses to run (on the Sabbath), even at the urging of the Prince of Wales himself.

Eric appreciates the gifts God has given him and has a strong sense of how to put those gifts to good use for God's glory. And as a runner with a passion for glorifying God, he is virtually unstoppable. His story beautifully illustrates the best example of how things fall into place for people who have their priorities straight.

Beginning a new church year is a great opportunity to examine priorities. All those skills honed in training for a marathon have a place in our day-to-day life of faith. We have a number of marathon runners and at least two mountain-climbers in our parish, and many more individuals exercising their faith in ways that glorify God—serving in soup kitchens, bringing food to those who are not able to get out of the house, spending time with our children in Sunday school, helping keep our physical plant clean and in good repair...

Not all of us find our purpose running races, unless you count chasing children up stairs, carrying groceries, vacuuming carpets or raking leaves, yet we all find ways to give thanks and glory to our God, engage in our community, and serve as role models for others in our midst.

And as busy as our lives become in December, we all need to dedicate a little time to slowing down. To that end, Joan Conley, Maylin Biggadike, and I (three of St. E's women priests) invite women of our parish to a quiet morning for contemplation and conversation in preparation for Christmas on Friday, December 13. Our reflections will touch upon the wilderness way highlighted in our Rector John Hartnett's *Tower* article.

This year, may your season be marked by a renewed sense of God's presence, and may the peace of God fill your hearts.

Faithfully,
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