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Dear Friends,

Looking back, and looking ahead First, thanks to all of you who contributed so much to making Lent, Holy Week, and Easter such a remarkably distinctive and holy season at St. Elizabeth's.

You made time for Saturday classes and Monday dinners and discussions, for Centering Prayer, choir practice and for singing in special services; you got up before dawn for early liturgies and faithfully attended services at midday. Over seventy of you—of all ages—came to the Good Friday Family Liturgy, and this year our choir soloists made a profound contribution to the music of our Good Friday Liturgies in the middle of the day. The Moms' Group, the Needlecrafters, and the Book Group continued their regular meetings, as did Sunday School, the Outreach ministries of the parish, and (intentionally simpler) Coffee Hours.

The choir and a chamber orchestra presented the Cherubini *Requiem* the Sunday before Palm Sunday, and Maggie Bird and the Altar Guild anticipated all of our liturgical needs and presided over one of the most emotionally powerful liturgies of our year, the stripping of the sanctuary at the end of the Service of Shadows on Maundy Thursday. I am particularly grateful to Dick Davies, who captured most of the images (I was going to say "on film" but that is no longer true...) and enabled us to have a visual record of this remarkable time. The Parish House bulletin boards show a sampling of these days and Dick's work.

That's the "looking back." Now for the "looking ahead."

Rector's Sabbatical in the Fall This fall Susan and I will begin my second sabbatical. This time away was originally scheduled for 2013, but the seemingly endless extension of the tower and narthex renovation made that an inauspicious time for me to be gone.

A sabbatical is confusing to consider. It looks like a vacation, but it is not. It is tempting to view it as an investment in future productivity, and, to be honest, that is how I view it much of the time. But when God created the Sabbath at the beginning of creation, it was not so he could go out and do an even better job over the next six days. Work is so seductive that we are tempted—and that is the word—to use work as the measure of all things. The Sabbath is to remind us that our identity,

and our sense of well-being, is most reliably, and most properly, grounded in our relationship with God, not in our work.

Listening to your inner Pharaoh When Moses argued the case for the Sabbath to Pharaoh, Pharaoh thought it was just a scam to get out of work one day a week. Pharaoh saw the Hebrews primarily as human resources—as workers—so anything that got in the way of their economic productivity was at best secondary and, at worst, seditious. And Pharaoh’s voice still is very present not only in our culture, but, I suspect, within each of us. I hear it within myself.

The culture has given the Sabbath a bad reputation. It is to be a time of rich engagement with the strength, beauty, and harmony of both creation and the Creator. The customary prohibitions associated with the Sabbath were not intended to make it a day of gray tedium, but to keep its true purpose from being taken over by metastasized appetites.

Do you remember the shorthand version of Gresham’s Law, “Bad money drives out good?” Part of the principle of the Sabbath is a realization that unless we are very mindful, unhelpful activities—which promise but do not deliver genuine re-creation—will drive out good.

Worship, Work, and Play Perhaps looking at how we spend our Sabbaths, someone has observed that we have become a people who worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship. What can be either good or bad news, depending on the choice we make, is that we become more and more like what we worship.

But I confess that I still have enough of Pharaoh in me to want to make sense of my sabbatical within the context of my work. While a sabbatical is not work, I cannot help but think that it ought to be productive. Some readers of the Adam and Eve story differentiate between “work” and “labor.” Before the Fall, Adam has work: God sets him in the garden (think “world”) to tend and care for it. Adam is meant to work, but the work is a gift, not a burden.

Work and Labor It is only after Adam opts for autonomy over obedience that his “work” becomes “labor.” Being utterly idle is no blessing. God-given work engages our abilities and gifts, and gives us a connection to our environment and our larger life which is satisfying and gratifying. To be able to stand back, look at what you have done, and say “this is good work” is a great blessing, and it seems to be what God does at the end of each of the first six days of Creation, and again for the entire seventh day.

We are not God, and we actually *create* nothing—we only work with the creation given to us by God. But as our best work harmoniously echoes (but does not replicate) God’s work, so perhaps we might step back and look for what is good in the work we have done.

We work better when something else matters more More than self-congratulatory boasting, this contemplation of work is a creative critique— learning from successes and failures, good and bad calls, and from those who do work similar to our own. We can learn to do better work when our sense of identity is not tied to the quality of the work we have done: if we can look honestly at our mistakes and failures, and see them as what they are, we might not be so likely to make the same mistakes again. But to have that ability, we need to have identity based on something other than our productivity as workers. When your ladder is leaning on a dead branch, you really cannot afford to cut it off...

And so I plan to use this sabbatical to reflect on what I have learned, mostly at St. Elizabeth’s. Whatever benefit this might provide to me, there are a number of practical benefits a sabbatical also offers to the congregation.

- Especially during long tenures, it is good for congregations to realize that they can do very well without their usual clergy leadership. There may be some unexpected bumps along the way, but once we realize that we can cope perfectly well with those unexpected things, we discover, or remember, the gifts that we have.
- Clergy and congregations both tend to seek new opportunities, new energy, or new visions by clergy leaving for a new position. St. Elizabeth's has a custom of long tenures, and a sabbatical is one way to reduce the risk of things becoming routine, or even in a rut, and also preserving the benefits of a long tenure.
- The rhythm and pace of life in a busy, active parish tend to minimize the amount of time available for thoughtful, deep reflection on the life of the church and of the parish. Without that reflection, parish life can become more characterized by activity and busyness than by deep life. When I am part of that dynamic of busyness, I see myself becoming less flexible, more defensive on many levels, and less effective at modeling the behavior and attitudes I am ordained to promote. Isaiah observes that where there is no vision, the people perish. Part of the goal of a sabbatical is for the clergy person to spend time considering the vision, so that the people might thrive.
- Jesus often removes himself from his daily activity to focus on his relationship with the Father. I admit up front that my sabbatical will not be characterized by the kind of austerity which I suspect was a hallmark of Jesus' time apart. But the dynamic of going away so I may come back will be similar.
- A sabbatical is also a good time for a clergy associate to gain experience leading a congregation. One can learn a great deal as an associate, but there are some things which one learns best by being the person in charge. The rector going away—and coming back—is, paradoxically, an important part in mentoring a younger clergy person.

Concerns Sabbaticals sometimes stir up concerns. Let me address a few.

- God willing, I am coming back. I am not looking for another position during this time.
- I will turn 63 at the end of June, and at some point, I will retire. But, again God willing, I would expect that to be some years in the future. When St. Elizabeth's seeks its next Rector, it will be good for there to be a not too distant memory of when the parish managed just fine with other leadership.
- I do not expect to come with radical changes to introduce to the life of St. Elizabeth's. While there is always room for improvement, I do not think the parish is broken. After the last sabbatical, I think the most radical change I introduced was our daily services of Morning Prayer in the Chapel. Certainly elements of that sabbatical informed my preaching, teaching, and the leading of liturgy, and that was one of my hopes for that, and for this, time away. The goal is renewal, not transformation beyond recognition.

A few other details

- According to the canons of the Episcopal Church, when the rector is away, the Wardens, not the assisting clergy, are in charge. As I mentioned above, Joan Conley will oversee the day-to-day operations of the congregation as if she were the rector, but officially, the final authority reverts to the Wardens, Chris Walsh and Mary Wynn Seiter.

- I do not expect to be in touch with the congregation while I am away, except through the Wardens.
- Correspondingly, I request that any concerns be directed to Joan or to the Wardens rather than to me. They will decide if I need to be consulted. A half-sabbatical—when the rector is physically away but constantly dealing with parish business by email—is the worst of both worlds. The parish loses the active, full time attention of the rector by his being away, but does not receive the benefit of his coming back renewed if he has been virtually present and devoting much of his time and energy to those things from which he is to take a Sabbath. And part of the benefit to individual members of the parish is to develop other resources during this time.
- As tempting as it might be to email me, or call me if I am in the Rectory, beginning “I know you are on sabbatical, but....” please resist that. You may always be in touch with Joan or the Wardens.

As we did in 2006, Susan and I will be away from the last week of August into the last week of December. We expect to be out of Ridgewood for most of that time, and out of the country from the middle of October until mid-December.

In September and early October we will be in and out of the Rectory as we make transitions from one place to another. I look forward to participating in Ally Brundige’s ordination to the priesthood at The Choate Rosemary Hall School in Wallingford, Connecticut on September 14. We will be back in the Rectory for a few days in mid-October as we prepare to lead the trip to England I have described in earlier issues of *The Tower*. We expect to be in the Rectory for a few days in mid-December to prepare the house for the Christmas holidays, and then we will be away for the week of Christmas itself. We will be back late in the month so I may officiate at St. Elizabeth’s at the wedding of Jennifer Whaley on New Year’s Eve—a wonderful event to look forward to during our time away.

Guests and Visitors The Rev. Ian Hamilton and his wife Margaret, our friends and friends of St. Elizabeth’s, will be in residence in the Rectory from late September through late October. Ian, who recently retired to St. Andrew’s, Scotland after a distinguished career in the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, will preach on two Sundays, and, as always, it is a blessing to have him at St. Elizabeth’s. Rabbi David Fine of Temple Israel will also be a guest preacher while I am away—my only regret is that I will not be here to hear him. The Rev. Maylin Biggadike and the Rev. Cathy Quinn will also share in the preaching in the fall, so while Joan will be our principal preacher, she will not need to be in the pulpit every week.

What we learned last time In 2006 The Rev. Lu-Anne Conner oversaw our liturgy and day-to-day life when I was away. Lu-Anne brought her own style to her work, but it was a style which she had developed here at St. Elizabeth’s. It was a time of great refreshment and renewal. I think Lu-Anne’s sermons got a little longer, but Vestry meetings definitely adjourned earlier. There were significant pastoral challenges in those months, and Lu-Anne addressed them with profound grace and dignity. In those months we were still settling into our new Parish House, and the parish ran an effective and productive Annual Ingathering. St. Elizabeth’s had Opening Sunday, gathered the Time and Talent information from the parish, observed All Saints’ Day and Advent (including The Great Litany...), and offered the Advent Concert, the Christmas Pageant, and all of the rich and festive services of the Christmas Season.

The parish was gracious to me on my return, but it was clear to everyone that they had done just fine in my absence. It was not a zero-sum game: both I and the congregation began the new year

stronger than we had been four months before. I have every confidence that our experience this coming autumn will be in that tradition.

If anyone has any questions of me about any of this, by all means be in touch. And as always, being in touch with the Wardens, Chris Walsh and Mary Wynn Seiter, is every bit as appropriate should you wish to be in conversation with them.

My final word on this is to thank you all for this great gift. A sabbatical is a prudent course for St. Elizabeth's, but it is also a great blessing for me and for Susan. I am very aware that few are able to participate in this time of reflection, growth, and Sabbath rest, and it is humbling—in a good way—to be the recipient of such wise and gracious generosity. The health of St. Elizabeth's—financial, relational, and in its leadership and governance—makes this gift possible, and I hope that I may use this gift, in turn, to support all of those great strengths on my return.

The Rev. Cn. John G. Hartnett

Rector