

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Over the past year and a half I've written a number of times about Holy Family and St. Irene Parishes becoming a collaborative (two parishes, two churches, one pastor, one staff). When anyone spoke to me about a new pastor being appointed and my leaving Concord I'd say, "Oh, that's still a couple of years away." And then I found myself saying, "Well, that's still a year away." And then, last Wednesday, walking back to the rectory from the July 4th Picnic in the Park it dawned on me that since the new pastor will begin his work in June 2019, this year's Independence Day activities would be my last Picnic in the Park... It's now July 2018 and so it's less than a year before I'll be leaving Concord. I'm not thrilled about facing a number of "last times" between now and then but I do know that I want to make those *last* times - *great* times! That's going to mean a lot of planning work - so let the planning begin here!

Back in the day, both Our Lady Help of Christians and St. Bernard Parishes had strong representation in the annual Concord Crop Walk. There were a number of years when I joined the walk too. Unfortunately our representation has faded over the years. While I'm grateful to those who *have* participated, I'm hoping that we can make our presence felt at this year's Crop Walk which will be on Sunday, October 21 at 2:15 p.m., stepping off from First Parish Church just across the street from us here at Holy Family. It's too early to sign up but *it's not too early* to put this on your calendar. And if your circumstances don't allow for your joining us, you can be part of the effort by praying for and pledging those who will be walking. More on this later - but for now: mark your calendar for Sunday, October 21!

Beginnings and endings... Our Lady Parish was my first pastorate and I remember so clearly my first days in West Concord. Back then I could never have even dreamed that I'd be in Concord for more than 25 years before leaving. Had things gone as usual I would have been transferred to a new assignment in March of 2006 (having completed two 6 year terms as pastor at OLHC) But in 2004 the archdiocese closed Our Lady's and the two Catholic parishes in town became one. When I was appointed pastor of Holy Family it was considered a new assignment, even if it was in the same town as my previous pastorate. When assigned to Our Lady's in 1994 it never crossed my mind that one day I would be given the painful task of closing a parish that I came to love so much. The silver lining in that very thick cloud was that I was able remain in a town I'd also come to love and to work with a community of Catholic people who are very close to my heart.

Endings and beginnings... Every beginning faces, somewhere in the future, its ending... And every ending announces, by its very nature, a new beginning... I don't intend this letter to stir up emotions. I'm writing about this because it's important that we acknowledge and make peace with our circumstances - whatever they may be - and especially when those circumstances aren't altogether pleasant ones. For my part I want to be at peace with these coming eleven months, grateful for all the years behind me and hopeful for what comes next (and no, I don't know where I'll be going!).

I have a lot of work to do before June 2019 and a big piece of that is the transformation of the rectory into our parish ministry center. You'll be hearing from me soon about that. I look forward to a great year with you (well, ok - 11 months!) and I ask that we pray for each other and for the next pastor of Holy Family and St. Irene Parishes!

Sincerely,
Fr. Fleming