

You may be familiar with the story of the man who was caught in a flood. The waters rose so high, forcing him to the roof of his house for safety. Being a devoutly religious person, the man prayed to God to save him. While he prayed, a neighbor in a canoe stopped to help him. The man rejected his neighbor, believing that God would prevail. A short time later, a search and rescue team drove a boat by the house. The man insisted that he was okay and that God would provide. Finally, a National Guard helicopter flew over. Again, the man dismissed the help, resolute in the belief that God would save him. Tragically, with help no longer available and the flood waters continuing to rise, the man was overwhelmed and died.

Instantly, he found himself in heaven before God. Comforted by the fact that he had been received into heaven, he, nevertheless, struggled with how he made it there. No longer able to contain himself, the man questioned God, “O Lord,” he said, “I prayed and prayed that you would save me from the flood that ultimately overwhelmed me. Why did you not help me?” God responded, “I did try to help you. At first, I sent your neighbor, but you rejected him. Then I sent a search and rescue team with the same results, and, finally, I sent the National Guard. And you dismissed them all!”

While the story is rather simplistic, its moral is an important one for us, particularly at this time in our parish’s history. For many, the miraculous involvement by God in life is something that we fantasize about. The hand of God plucks us out of the plum of a problem that we find ourselves in, and we know beyond the shadow of a doubt that God exists. However, God rarely works in this fashion. Rather, the incarnational involvement of the divine that the aforementioned story expresses so well is often the way that God moves and acts among us. Thus, while we pray, we also act. The two are not diametrically opposed. They are parts of the whole that is life and life in God.

Therefore, the recent parish meeting informed those gathered of the work that we are doing regarding the search for a tenant and the secondary work to prepare for the eventuality that a tenant may not emerge. Our co-warden, Sue Rutz, offered a clear and levelheaded report of what we have done over the past two years to engage a tenant to replace Canaan Ridge School. The difficulties in locating a tenant, and our current position with no tenant secured. Thus, she discussed the work of two committees comprised of former wardens to collect data and review what options we have regarding the two major properties that we care for: the Historic Church

and Rectory property on Old Long Ridge Road and the Church and Parish Hall property on Long Ridge Road.

Clearly, these are conversations that none of us want to have. They are, however, issues that confront us. One of the aspects of the St. Francis community that I appreciate and value is the deep faith of so many that is expressed not in pie-in-the-sky wishful thinking, but rather the deep faith that is expressed in the use of the pragmatic, reasoned, and courageous minds and hearts that God has given us to do the work of God in the world where we find ourselves.

As I mentioned on Sunday, two parishes in Stamford are about to--or may soon--close. Christ the Healer will hold its final service on Friday, June 22, and St. Andrew's future is presently uncertain. Both of these churches have been in difficult straits for over 20 years. Thus, while I am saddened by the undoing of these communities, I also know that the difficult conversations never really happened until the very end. I hope and pray that this is not what is in store for St. Francis. Given the demographics of North Stamford and the dearth of participation in religious communities by young people and more and more in society, we travel into some mighty strong headwinds as a community of faith. Some of the dangers for us include denying the context in which we find ourselves, rejecting the great minds within our community to create possible solutions, and wavering in our courage to act decisively when confronted by well-analyzed data and reasoned options.

I do not know what the future holds. I do know that we have an amazingly vibrant community that is a small church with many properties and no tenant at this time. I also know that God is very much at work in life, though it may be in new and different ways than we are used to or expect. As Sue articulated, if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask a warden, a vestry member, or me. We are more than willing to talk these issues through with you. We may not always agree. However, I do hope that we never deny the reality of help that comes repeatedly for us, because we believe that the miracle God will perform is just around the corner. For my two cents, the presence of God is very much at work in St. Francis through the lives of such gifted, loving, and grace-filled people as you.