

The Bishop's Message
December 2009

It's Time!

On Friday, November 20, I shared with the Diocesan Council and The Standing Committee my plans to retire as the Bishop of Springfield effective February 1, 2010. I asked for their concurrence which was forthcoming. As a result, in accordance with Canon, I will petition the House of Bishops through the Presiding Bishop's office for the approval of that plan.

You may be aware that I have been giving considerable time and energy to discern God's will in this matter. My major concern in all of this is the future ministry of this Diocese. Suffice it to say that after much prayer and conversation with Melinda and conferring with a good many people including the Archdeacon, the Chancellors, the Diocesan Administrator and Treasurer, it became clear to me that February 1, 2010, was the prudent time to conclude my ministry as your bishop. My decision was predicated on the assessment that what my leadership might contribute to the Diocese and its ministry did not outweigh the appropriateness of retirement.

On June 29, 2009, I celebrated the forty-fifth anniversary of my ordination to the diaconate, and on January 6, 2010, I will celebrate the forty-fifth anniversary of my ordination to the priesthood. I believe that makes me the senior active (under age 72) ordained person in the House of Bishops though there are several persons with a longer episcopate. That is a long time and frankly I am weary.

As I pen this missive on Thanksgiving Day, I am very aware that I am most blessed. The greatest blessing I have received over the past nearly eighteen years as the Bishop of Springfield has been to serve the clergy and lay people of this Diocese as your chief shepherd and to work with such committed folks in the service of the Gospel of Christ and the building of God's Kingdom.

My biggest regret has been my inability to influence the House of Bishops from embracing the non-biblical innovations which are leading our Church away from "the faith once delivered to the saints." By every measure those actions are destroying The Episcopal Church and are threatening the Anglican Communion itself.

People have asked both Melinda and me what our post-retirement plans are. Though we do not have any firm plans at present, a number of possibilities are developing. It is not our plan to remain long-term in Springfield. Nevertheless, we are not likely to leave before our home on Clipper Road is sold. That may take some time, so we may be in residence here for a number of months if not years. We'll just have to see.

Unquestionably, my life and ministry have been highly influenced by my experience as a Navy Reserve Chaplain. Sailors are not all that prone to suffer from what may be seen as “separation syndrome” mainly because detaching from a particular billet occurs so frequently in every Navy career. When change occurs the expectation is that people will meet again in the “fleet.” That’s how I feel in relationship to the Diocese of Springfield. In this case, I expect to keep in touch with the Diocese and its people though, for the most part, it will be appropriately from afar. I desire to be supportive of the Diocese’s future work and you all will continue to be in my thoughts and prayers. I would like to participate in future gatherings from time to time, sitting somewhere near the back of the room.

I do not ever expect to completely retire from ministry. But I desire a slower pace with less stress and much shorter hours in order to spend much more time with Melinda and our family. God willing that will happen.

So, by the time you read this, in a month and a half or so I will bid you all a fond farewell as your Bishop with the assurance that you will always hold a special place in my heart and in Melinda’s. In the meantime, Melinda joins me in wishing you all a blessed Christmas and the happiest of New Years.

The Right Reverend Peter Hess Beckwith
Tenth Bishop of Springfield