

The Bishop's Message
January 2010

Thank You!

I cannot think of a better way to begin this final opportunity to address you through this medium as the Bishop of Springfield than to simply say, "Thank you!" Thank you for your faith and commitment to discern and follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Thank you for making this extraordinarily challenging ministry so rewarding and the privilege it has been. Thank you for the kind consideration and support so many of you have so generously showered upon Melinda and me over these past eighteen years.

In the excellent sermon preached by Bishop Thompson at my consecration eighteen years ago the end of next month, he said a number of things that have resonated with me all these years. If you were there you no doubt will recall he began by saying, "Peter Beckwith is incompetent to be a bishop," to which I replied "Amen!" At the time, having served over twenty-seven years in ordained ministry, I was well aware that no one is competent or worthy to serve God's people in His name. If that is true in relationship to being a deacon and a priest, it certainly is true in relationship to being a bishop. How could anyone think he or she is competent to serve as a shepherd of one of Christ's faith communities let alone a chief shepherd? The least bit of sensitivity enables a person to understand the overwhelming inappropriateness of presuming adequacy in representing God to His people and people to God, which lies at the very heart of every true priesthood.

Early on in my ordained ministry I wrestled, as I continue to do today, with the reality that when we attempt to do God's work it can always be done better and there is always more to do. I remember sitting at my desk in Springfield, as well as in Worthington and Saginaw, well after midnight with a lot more to do saying to myself, "I have to go home!" I knew if I didn't, important work would be impeded the next day. The danger here, of course, is becoming too narrowly focused on the importance and immediacy of the work. This shortsightedness can lead to burnout, or simply saying it can't be done so why give it one's best effort. The genius of *via media* is no better observed than in this situation. No work is more important. It deserves our best effort and, though it can never be done well enough, God will use it for His ultimate purpose.

As I conclude this formal ministry, I recognize my efforts have been grossly inadequate in far too many ways. Nevertheless, I thank God for the opportunity to serve Him as your bishop and I continue to marvel at the ways he has used me to advance His Kingdom over the last eighteen years of this episcopacy, forty-five years of priesthood and diaconate and, indeed, the seventy years of my life. Most

importantly, I am well aware that the good that has been accomplished through my efforts says much less about me than it does about the grace of God and the love of those I've encountered along the way beginning with my family and quickly extending to numerous clergy and lay mentors I've had in the Church and in the United States Navy.

I also recall Bishop Thompson saying in his sermon that I would be an interim bishop -- the person who would serve between Bishop Hultstrand and the person who will be elected next fall to serve as the XI Bishop of Springfield. As I reflect now on the profound nature of that statement, I think of two things. The first is: All of our good efforts are only a small part of a much larger picture. What is of ultimate importance is how we use what we have received and how what we do becomes a foundation upon which others may build on behalf of the Gospel. It really isn't about us, it's all about God and His eternal plan for us and all His creation. Truly, stewardship is relevant to every aspect of what we are, what we have and what we do.

The second thing is how quickly the time has gone by. "Why, it was only yesterday..." as the saying goes! For sure, we all are merely *locum tenentes* -- people who hold the place, wherever and whatever that place may be. And certainly it is only for a relatively short period of time when viewed in the light of eternity.

As this ministry is quickly winding down, please allow me to share one last, very critical and perhaps most important observation I can offer: Temporal passions, whatever they may be, are not a compass. Don't follow them! If there is one thing the ages will judge that The Episcopal Church has failed to do, it will be that it has failed to understand that maxim.

And now, as I bid you adieu, may God bless and keep you all your days.

The Right Reverend Peter Hess Beckwith
Tenth Bishop of Springfield