



FOR UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN.  
UNTO US A SON IS GIVEN.

**CHRISTMAS 2010**

**Greetings, One & All,**

Another year has sailed by in practically no time flat. It's December once again, time to send greetings to family and friends far and near.

I suppose I should begin this year's Christmas letter by acknowledging the "big change" my students and co-workers noticed when I went back to work after last year's Christmas vacation. On New Year's Day I shaved off the moustache I'd had since 1981. Like Walter Cronkite (who described his own facial hair in his autobiography *A Reporter's Life*), I originally grew my moustache in an attempt to look older. After nearly three decades, the desire to look older doesn't seem quite so strong, so I figured the "baby-faced" look was more appropriate.

This has certainly been a year of weather extremes! I'm not sure I remember a year when we had so many snow days, and almost all of them were legitimate times when we couldn't have had classes if we'd wanted to. The weather also affected my college night classes. I taught one class that met on Monday nights, and between snow cancellations and federal holidays, that class met only two times before mid-term. Even when winter ended, the winds continued to blow. The same storms that came as blizzards in winter brought horizontal rain and flooding in spring, gritty dust clouds in summer, and driving sleet in fall. It's not a good omen for this coming winter that we'd already had our first snow day before Thanksgiving.

Even more than usual, travel dominated the year for me. Last December I braved some of that weather to make a trip that turned out a bit different than I'd originally planned. After barely making it down to Oskaloosa to spend Christmas with my family, I found out that the airports I had reservations to fly through after the holiday were closed. I altered my reservations and braved the heaviest snow northwest Missouri has ever seen to make it down to Kansas City (the nearest airport that planes were actually flying out of). From there I flew to Boston, where I spent the better part of the week between Christmas and New Year's. I had a wonderful time out there, and I particularly enjoyed seeing a holiday concert from the Boston Pops Orchestra.

The trip to Boston was originally supposed to have been almost free, a mileage redemption with Northwest Airlines (on which I flew the last flight in the company's history New Year's Eve). With the re-scheduling, I had to pay for that trip, but the miles were refunded, so I was able to take another "free" vacation late in the summer. I flew Delta (Northwest's successor) out to New York. I got a cheap hotel in Queens and spent five wonderful days exploring the city and its environs. When people asked me what I did, my response was, "What didn't I do?" I went to *West Side Story* on Broadway, saw both the Yankees and the Mets play in their new ballparks, toured the Federal Reserve Bank, gawked at the paintings in the Museum of Modern Art, enjoyed the view from the top of Rockefeller Center, crossed the Hudson on the longest pedestrian bridge in the world, had fun exploring countless different neighborhoods, visited the Culinary Institute of America, saw Franklin Roosevelt's home, and had an elegant and delicious lunch at the Waldorf=Astoria Hotel. It really was one of the most enjoyable trips I've ever made.

I made one other big jaunt on my own this year. The weekend before Memorial Day I took advantage of a ridiculously low airfare and flew out to Washington state to see my baseball-playing former student Brad Nelson. Brad spent the 2010 season with the Tacoma Rainiers, the AAA affiliate of the Seattle Mariners. He had a decent year that was capped off by winning the Pacific Coast League championship. I had a nice visit with Brad in Tacoma (mostly thanks to an almost endless rain delay), and I saw him play two very good games. I also had fun exploring the Seattle area, including a fascinating tour of Boeing's main factory.

I had one other trip in 2010. In June I took our quiz bowl team out to Washington, D.C. for the National Academic Championships. While going to nationals has become almost routine (we're already planning a 2011 journey to New Orleans), this year was kind of special. The kids won three games in Washington, which ties the best a Garrigan team has ever done. We had very nice trip, too. The only bad part was that on the way home the alternator went out on one of the school suburbans. Fortunately it happened in one of the best possible locations (suburban Cleveland), and we managed to get the problem taken care of almost immediately.

Aside from travel, the big news for me came in October. I was honored by the Sioux City Diocese with the Bishop's Award for Excellence in Education. It really is quite an honor, and it's particularly unusual for a Protestant to receive this Catholic school award. I was amazed and truly touched by all the alumni and parents of former students who sent cards and letters or actually attended the

awards dinner. It's sometimes hard to fathom all the different people I've worked with at Garrigan. There were people I hadn't seen in twenty years who seemed genuinely delighted I was receiving this honor. I know there are other teachers who deserve the award far more than I do, but there's no question I was proud to be recognized.

I began my 28<sup>th</sup> year at Garrigan just before Thanksgiving. I'm teaching four different math classes now, including a college-credit Statistics course we offer on-site at the high school. I also supervise the school website. This year that entailed more work than usual, because we moved the entire site to a new server ([bishopgarrigan.org](http://bishopgarrigan.org)), a tedious job that required thousands of different links to be updated. I continue to announce football games, and I work with speech (where we had two all-state performers this year), quiz bowl (where at one tournament they had a special coaches' game and I captained the winning team), and with our weekly radio news show (which just aired its 750<sup>th</sup> episode). I also spend more time than I'd like working on the school's core curriculum and school improvement committee.

I'm also in charge of student council, which includes working with intramural basketball and Homecoming. This year's Homecoming was a time of mixed emotions. Most of the week's events went wonderfully, but during our football game a longtime teacher and coach (Deacon Bob Larsen) suffered a heart attack and died. That was certainly a time of great sadness, but it was also a time when our kids were able to come together and help each other past their grief.

My room at school saw an improvement this past year. I was the first teacher at Garrigan to get a new "smart board" (though technically that term is a registered trademark of a competitor of the company than made mine), which combines a computer, a projector, and an old-fashioned writing board all in one. I'm not sure it accomplishes much of anything that couldn't be done just as efficiently with less flashy technology. I do use it, though, and the kids seem to like the thing a lot.

I also continue to work for Iowa Lakes Community College, where I've been on the adjunct staff since 1992. I worked hard there in the spring and summer, but I wasn't offered any formal courses this fall. I did end up working independently (and basically on a volunteer basis) with a woman who needed a specific class for graduation. I'll be teaching two college courses (Math for Liberal Arts and Statistics) in the spring. That will certainly keep me busy, but the money will be nice.

When I'm not working to earn money, a huge part of my time this past year has been spent working for the church. For reasons I still haven't been told, our minister was suddenly asked to resign last spring. We're sort of permanently between pastors now, and we'll continue that way until next summer, when we should be getting a permanent pastor from a new rural ministry program of the United Church of Christ. During the transition, as worship leader I've been responsible for planning the services and putting together the weekly bulletin. I mostly enjoy that, but it can be very time consuming. While a retired Methodist minister has filled our pulpit most of the time, there have also been a couple more occasions this year I've done the entire service—including delivering the sermon. Attendance is down, but the church has been doing surprisingly well in the interim. What's more it certainly helps the budget to just be paying a speaker's honorarium, rather than a full salary and benefits.

The rest of the family is doing pretty well. My brother Paul made a big transition this year. He's no longer in teaching and is now a full-time Methodist minister. Paul and Nancy live in the town of Rippey, and Paul and another pastor serve three churches in the Perry area. Their daughter Rachel works at the librarian for the Earlham schools west of Des Moines, and their son Tim is a broadcast technician for WHO radio.

The rest of the family is also doing well. Margaret had a busy year, with even more travel than me. Her big vacation was a trip to Egypt in January. Though officially retired, she does translation for area schools and also teaches Spanish and social studies classes for Northeast Iowa Community College. John and Janet took a cruise to Alaska this fall. John has been doing a lot of writing (including a full length novel), and he worked as a supervisor for the census last spring. Steve is still in northern Minnesota and seems to busier than any of us.

I saw the extended family under both happy and sad circumstances this year. My Uncle Bill died this fall after a lengthy illness, and I saw many of the Burrow relatives in Waverly for his funeral. Perhaps the biggest news on that side of the family was that my cousin Denny Hemingson (Macky's son, who plays steel guitar as one of Tim McGraw's "Dancehall Doctors") was inducted into the Iowa Music Hall of Fame. The hall of fame museum is in Okoboji, and sometime soon I need to make a trip over there to see the display on him.

I saw much of the other side of the family at the Miller reunion in Independence last spring. It was especially nice to see my cousin Ceil (the closest in the family to my age) and her kids. They're living in France semi-permanently now, and apparently Ceil just hosted Thanksgiving dinner for the American community in Bordeaux. In addition to the reunion, I was pleased to see my Aunt Alaire at Easter and again when our family gathered at her place in Coralville for Thanksgiving.

I hope this letter finds all of you doing well. May your Christmas be a happy one, and may 2011 be a wonderful year for you and for everyone throughout the world.

**MERRY CHRISTMAS!**