



Christmas 2014

Seasons Greetings, one and all!

While it's already the second week of Advent, I've finally finished putting up the decorations. Christmas is coming fast, and it's time to send out greetings to all my family and friends. This has been an up and down year, and certainly a very busy one. For the most part it's been a good one, though.

The biggest news this year is probably that last August I got a new (or at least different) car. After sixteen years and 218,000 miles, my old Chevy Metro had gotten to the point that it would take major repairs to get through another winter. I can't come close to affording what they want for new cars these days, so I went shopping for a used vehicle. The car I ended up buying was quite a change. It's a black Mitsubishi Eclipse, a very sporty car and loaded with about every option imaginable. It's not really what I expected to buy, but it's definitely a cool car. Making the payments has made this a rather lean fall, but it's good to have a more reliable vehicle. Hopefully it will stay that way for a while.

It's hard to believe that just before Thanksgiving I began my thirty-second year at Bishop Garrigan High School. This has honestly not been the best year ever at school. There's been a lot of extra work, with very little to show for it. I enjoy actually teaching, but it seems that each year the powers that be allow me to do less and less of that. Our school had a visit from the state department of education this fall, and it was annoying (though hardly surprising) that the evaluators were far more concerned with paperwork and having everyone use the proper buzz words than with what actually went on in the classrooms.

We've had construction going on out at school throughout the fall as we prepare to add younger kids to the mix in our building. Next year I'll be moving to a new room, the fourth one I will have been in at Garrigan. I can't say I'm really looking forward to that, but it probably is time to throw out all the junk I've accumulated and start fresh.

In addition to teaching math classes, I still keep very busy with various school activities. I continue to work with speech and student council, which includes planning homecoming and our intramural basketball program. This was also the twenty-fifth year I've been working with our quiz bowl team. Perhaps the experience is paying off, because last summer the team made its best showing ever at the National Academic Championships. They made playoffs at nationals for the first time ever and finished with a winning record overall—not bad when competing against some of the best teams in the country. The team has already qualified to make another trip to nationals next summer, and hopefully they'll make another decent showing.

Ever since 1995 I've been in charge of the school website. That continued this year—sort of. The Diocese of Sioux City decided that it was no longer permissible for our students to produce the school website. Instead they've gone to a service that generates more or less identical sites for all the schools in the diocese. After a lot of discussion



with the administration, we reached a compromise that essentially means our school has two websites. Our development office produces the “official” site, using the service the diocese contracted. My students continue to do what they’ve always done, but their work is now on a separate site—bggoldenbears.org. I spent much of the summer working to move things to the new site, and there’s been a lot of extra work since then as well. I honestly think the whole change is silly, but I’m thankful that at least the kids still have a home for their work.

Aside from my regular work, I also did a lot of tutoring this year. This was mostly with seniors and recent graduates who were taking college courses online. Math is definitely not a subject I’d recommend people take over the internet, but by tutoring I’ve learned a lot about what is expected in those courses.

I also taught one class at Iowa Lakes Community College last summer, and I’m scheduled to teach another this coming spring. Hopefully that will become a regular part of my schedule once again.

Aside from work, church has taken up the biggest part of my time. We were between pastors again for the first two-thirds of the year, and as worship leader it fell on me to plan the weekly services. I even ended up giving a couple more sermons on Sundays when we weren’t able to find supply speakers. Everything went well, but I’m very thankful that we have hired a new full-time minister. I do hope the church can have some real stability again.

Travel is always my biggest form of recreation, and while there was a little less of it this year, I was still able to get away a bit. My biggest trip was in August. My sister Margaret and I took the train out to Rochester, New York. We spent a couple days there and then rented a car and drove through the Finger Lakes, the Adirondack Mountains, and clear up to the St. Lawrence Valley on the border with Quebec. For various reasons the trip actually ended up being quite a bit different than what I’d originally planned. It was still a nice vacation, though, and we enjoyed ourselves immensely. I’m looking forward to another little getaway up in the Twin Cities at Christmas.

The trip with me was just a small part of Margaret’s adventures for the year. She went down to the Southwest in winter, and then in the fall she took a cruise to the Baltic. She’s planning a trip to Spain next fall with my brothers John and Paul and their spouses. Margaret is doing very well. She’s lost a great deal of weight and cut her hair. This coming year she’s planning to essentially retire a second time, as she’ll no longer be teaching college courses.

Paul has also had a busy year of traveling. Last February he and Nancy visited the Holy Land, and in the summer they went to Mackinac Island and around Lake Superior. Paul continues to serve as co-pastor at three Methodist churches in the Perry area, with both English and Spanish-speaking congregations. My brother Steve is still in northern Minnesota. He keeps busy with his work and with a variety of adult mentoring projects.

Of all my siblings, I’ve had the least contact with my brother John, but I had a good visit with him and Janet at Thanksgiving. Their main trip this year was to Toronto, and they seemed to enjoy it immensely. John (like Margaret and Paul, a retired teacher) spent the summer trapping insects for the USDA, and Janet continues to work as the personal assistant to an insurance executive in Dubuque.

I’ve seen my Aunt Alaire multiple times this year, and I also was able to see Aunt Max and Uncle Harvey in summer. Like all of us, they’re getting older, but they seem to be doing all right. Alaire was in very good spirits when we were down in Coralville for Thanksgiving.

I hope all of you are doing okay as well. May your Christmas season be great, and may the blessings of the season stay with you all through 2015.

Happy Holidays!

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