

# Christmas Blessings

December, 2019

I got a letter today from a politician who wished me “Happy Holidays” in addition to asking for money. While the greeting didn’t get me to open my wallet, it did remind me that it was time to send my own annual greetings out to family and friends.

While 2019 started as a fairly nondescript year for me, the final five months were anything but that. I’d gotten sick while on vacation in Canada at the end of July, and things just got worse as the school year started. The climax came on September 11, when I was hospitalized with dehydration due to a severe diabetic reaction. My glucose level was 980, which the doctor said was the highest he’d seen on a conscious person. I’m truly grateful to the many people who offered prayers and support to me, both when I was in the hospital and when I was on the mend.

I can’t say I particularly enjoy pricking my fingers twice a day to monitor my blood sugar or injecting insulin every night. Fortunately, though, the medications and changes in diet have brought me back into the normal range. There have been some side effects, including vision issues that will lead to eye surgery this winter. As Christmas approaches, though, I’m extremely thankful I’m still here and that I’m feeling **much** better than I was back in September. Indeed when we had our employee screening for the health insurance company, my numbers were very good across the board.

This fall I began my thirty-seventh year on the staff of Bishop Garrigan High School. It does make me feel old when more and more of the kids I teach today are children of the students I taught back in the ‘80s and ‘90s and more and more of my colleagues are also my former students.

My schedule includes Advanced Algebra & Trigonometry, Geometry, various advanced math classes, and web design. This fall I’ve also been teaching a Consumer Math class for the first time in more than twenty years. Preparing for all those classes is no small chore, but I do enjoy the variety of students I work with.

I still work with a wide range of activities. The biggest change this year is that after decades of being an assistant, I’m now the head speech coach. I’m not positive I like the responsibility that brings, but I’m getting used to it. I’ve already begun rehearsals for group speech, and we’ve got a huge group of kids participating this year.

I also work with quiz bowl, and the team continues to be very successful. We went to nationals in Chicago last summer, and the team has already qualified for another trip to nationals in 2020. I continue to be in charge of our student-produced website, and I do the editing for our weekly “Bear Facts” radio show. I’m officially in charge of our math team as well, though that hasn’t gone too well this year. There are far fewer competition opportunities than there used to be, and I’ve got fewer kids interested in participating. Hopefully things will go better with that in the spring.

I’m still the main P.A. announcer at our football games, though I missed this year’s Homecoming game after being hospitalized. It’s not the first time I’ve missed a game, but I’ve only been away from the mike two or three times in more than twenty years.

As always I’ve been enjoying following the other activities at school. This winter should be especially fun, as both our boys and girls basketball teams are extremely talented.



I taught another evening Statistics class at Iowa Lakes Community College last spring. It's always a bit of a crap shoot with those classes, but I had a really good group of students this time around. I should be teaching at the college again on Thursday nights this coming semester, and hopefully things will go as well as they did last time.

One change in my activities away from school is that I'm no longer on the board for the Iowa Council of Teachers of Mathematics. After being their newsletter editor literally for decades, that job was rendered obsolete when they chose to go to all-electronic communications. They're really pushing things like Facebook and Twitter, and I've never gotten into those at all. While I do enjoy having a bit more free time, I must say it was kind of strange to attend the state math conference this fall and not go to the board meeting or help out at the registration table.

I'm still on the board at First Congregational Church in Algona. I'm also on the pastor/parish relations committee, I prepare communion, I update the church website, and almost every week I serve as a lector there as well. I'll often hear from people who hear me reading on our church's weekly radio broadcasts, which makes me pretty confident we reach more people over the radio than we do in the church itself.

Some big news this year was that after more than two years spent cleaning and sorting through things, we finally sold my sister's house east of Decorah. It really has been a chore dealing with that house, and I'm delighted to have it done. I'm pretty sure my brothers feel the same way.

I made two separate trips to eastern Canada in the past year. Last Christmas I was in Ottawa, the Canadian capital. While it was very chilly, I had a wonderful time there. The weather was quite the opposite in July when I flew to Toronto and then took the train out to Halifax. While I suspect some food poisoning on that trip set off all the issues I referred to earlier, overall that trip too was very enjoyable.

Assuming I can stay healthy, I'll be doing more traveling this coming year. Indeed I'm looking forward to taking the trip of a lifetime next summer. Some of the money from Margaret's house will be paying for a vacation to New Zealand. That's a place Margaret herself always wanted to visit, so it seems like a fitting tribute to her. I'm planning to fly from Chicago to Auckland in the middle of July, and I should be returning by way of Los Angeles in August. While the flight to New Zealand is expensive, domestic flights within the country are incredibly cheap and lodging is also surprisingly affordable. That allows me to spend three weeks hopping all over the country for not much more than the cost of getting there.

The Miller side of our family had a big get-together down in Iowa City last summer honoring Harv and Max's milestone birthdays. It was great to see everybody again. There was some sadness on the Burrow side with my Aunt Macky Hemingson's death. She was the last survivor of my father's siblings, and we'll definitely all miss her.

My more immediate family is mostly doing well. With the exception of my brother Steve (who's back in Florida), everyone continues to be in the Iowa towns they've been at home at for years. John and Janet made a big trip to Prague this fall, and Paul and Nancy took a cruise to Cuba last January and then travelled all around the South in November. There's not a lot of news in the family otherwise, and basically that's a good thing.

People have sometimes asked me why I bother writing an annual letter and sending out Christmas cards. In this social media age, fewer and fewer people send the traditional holiday greetings. I always enjoy writing things up, though, and I've always enjoyed the process of addressing and sending out cards. Christmas is a time of traditions, and the annual greetings make me think back to my mother who spent all her spare time writing to penpals around the world. She always enjoyed hearing from them, and her warm wishes at the holidays were genuine.

My wishes for you and your families are genuine as well. I do hope all of you have a wonderful holiday season, and may 2020 be a happy, healthy, and prosperous year for everyone.

# Merry Christmas!

