



## *Greetings, Friends and Family,*

I'm writing this the day after Thanksgiving, after listening to festive music while driving. The song "We Need a Little Christmas" is going through my head, and I don't think anything could be more appropriate for the theme of this year. I doubt that in the future much of anyone will get nostalgic for 2020.

Believe it or not, this November marked the start of my thirty-eighth year on the Bishop Garrigan staff. I'm now the most senior teacher in the high school, though sometimes it seems like just yesterday when I started. The year started out very well. The big news at school at the start of the year was basketball. Both Garrigan's girls and boys made it to the state tournament, and both teams ended up as the runners-up in the state. The boys' championship game was right at the start of all the COVID restrictions, and I felt privileged to be one of just 100 fans who were allowed inside Wells—Fargo Arena to see our team play.

Right after the basketball tournaments, we shifted to having school online. Most of Iowa's schools just did supplementary activities online in the spring, but Garrigan continued full-time for-credit learning. For me that meant making YouTube videos of the notes for my classes and creating online quizzes that the kids took each week. I've never worked harder in my life, and I'm pretty sure my colleagues would say the same. We got through the spring semester, though, and while it may not have been the best method of education, our kids did keep learning while others basically just sat around.

The pandemic had a big effect on the activities I work with. We did well in group speech last winter, and all but one of our entries got 1's at district individual speech contest. Unfortunately the state individual contest was cancelled, so we'll never know how those kids might have done. All our spring quiz bowl contests were also done virtually. We'd planned to head down to New Orleans for national quiz bowl, but that too was done online.

We're back to in-person classes this fall, but there are lots of precautions we've never dealt with before. I wear a face shield all day long, and about a third of the desks in my classroom have been removed so that all the students can maintain proper social distance. I frequently wipe off surfaces with disinfectant, we did parent—teacher conferences via Zoom, and each week we watch our school masses (important events in a Catholic school) by livestream rather than attending them in person.

We've had a lot of kids and many staff members at school who have come down with COVID-19. There have also been many other students who haven't gotten the disease, but who had to quarantine because they'd had contact with other people who did test positive. Because of that, I've had to do a lot of stuff twice this fall—teaching my classes in person as usual, but also doing work online for the students in quarantine. Again that's been a huge amount of work, but—knock on wood—mostly it's gone pretty well.

Quiz bowl has continued to be all virtual this fall. I worked very hard to create sixteen rounds of questions so that we could do our home tournament online using just three readers. While we had a few glitches at the start, the tournament went surprisingly well. We've participated in a few other online quiz bowls, though many of the tournaments we usually attend were completely cancelled this year.

All the speech contests will also be virtual this year. We'll be making recordings of the kids' performances (following strict rules to make sure things aren't edited together), and judges will be viewing them remotely. It will certainly be different, but hopefully it will go all right.

Once again this year I was hired to teach Statistics as a night class at Iowa Lakes Community College. For many reasons that was an interesting experience. I began the year by teaching over the college's TV system, but there were technology problems almost every week. Then, when spring break came around, the class immediately switched to an online format. It was actually tougher to deal with that course than with my high school classes. One of the biggest issues was that I ended up with three foreign students who had returned to their home countries, which had shut down even more than we had here. They had no way to get basic supplies they needed

for the class, and I had to think creatively to make things work for them as well as for everyone else. I did get through that class, and several of the students complimented the work I'd done with it.

Another thing that the coronavirus affected was my church. I continue to serve as lay leader at First Congregational Church, and I'm also on the church board. We decided to go to online services only about the time school closed down, and we continued online until midsummer. We went back to in-person worship, holding outdoor services several times when the weather permitted. Then, when COVID cases spiked again in November, we went online again and will continue that way at least through the end of the year. Most of the time we've recorded the main portion of the "Sunday" service on Saturday morning. I then edit it to include music that is recorded separately and upload it to the church website so it's there for members to access at the usual time.

Usually in these annual summaries I reminisce about the travel I've done. If this year had been normal, I'd have a lot to talk about now. My plan was to head to New Zealand last summer for what would truly have been the trip of a lifetime. Unfortunately New Zealand handled the pandemic much better than our country did, and understandably they banned foreigners from entering, lest they bring the disease with them. The trip is in limbo, and it looks like it will be 2022 before I'm able to make it.

I'd also planned a trip to New York at Christmas, and that also had to be cancelled because of restrictions the Empire State put on out-of-state visitors. I did a lot of work planning a replacement trip to Los Angeles and Phoenix, but then California also required all visitors there to quarantine. So I'll probably be spending Christmas 2020 at home, the first time I've done that in years.

I did salvage one consolation prize out of my cancelled New Zealand trip. In August I used part of an airline credit to make a short getaway to Portland and Seattle. Most of the tourist attractions were closed, of course, but I enjoyed hiking around and just seeing some different places. I do hope that next year I'll be able to do a bit more travelling.

A year ago I wrote of being in the hospital with a diabetic attack. Diabetes is known to lead to cataracts, and my vision rapidly deteriorated after the hospitalization. I had cataract surgery in December and January, and I'm **very** grateful everything was taken care of before all the pandemic closures. Things went well, my vision is back to where it used to be, and I've also been managing my blood sugar levels with minimal issues.

I guess the other big news for me this year was that I traded cars. My old Mitsubishi had gotten to the point where the repairs it needed exceeded the value of the vehicle, so it was time for a change. I now drive a 2014 Kia Optima that had less than 10,000 miles when I bought it. While technically used, it seems like a truly new car. It's a bit larger than I'd prefer, and it has far too many electronic controls. On the whole I like it, though, and hopefully I'll get many years of use out of it.

As for the rest of the family, the biggest news is from my brother Paul, who retired for the second time this summer. He and Nancy now live in a very nice condo in Indianola. Paul is no longer a Methodist pastor, though he does continue to do things like translating preaching aids into Spanish.

A sad item of family news is that my Aunt Alaire died last summer. She had declined quite a lot, and she spent her final days in a care center. Unfortunately due to COVID restrictions we were unable to see her before she died. I especially missed her this Thanksgiving, when I thought about the many times I'd gone down to Iowa City to celebrate the holiday with her.

Another of my Miller relatives from Iowa City has literally been in the news. That's my cousin Chris, who seemingly out of nowhere was appointed by President Trump this fall to be the acting Secretary of Defense. You couldn't pay me to do a job like that, but Chris (who served as a green beret and became a colonel before retiring from the Army) has a good background for it. I certainly wish him well, and I hope his time in the job will be uneventful.

2020 has certainly been a year like no other for all of us. We've made it through, though, and hopefully things will settle down a bit so that we can all enjoy the holidays and the coming year. Here's hoping 2021 will be happy, healthy, and prosperous for everyone.

Merry Christmas!  
David M. Burrow