

Shepherding with *gladness*

An interview with
Bishop Walter A. Hurley



By Danielle
McGrew
Tenbusch

NOTE:
Interview has
been edited
for length and
clarity.

Pope Francis appointed the Most Rev. Walter A. Hurley, Bishop Emeritus of Grand Rapids, as apostolic administrator for the Diocese of Saginaw on Oct. 17. In this capacity, Bishop Hurley serves as the caretaker for the diocese during this time of transition, addressing the spiritual needs of the diocese and keeping things working in an orderly way until a new bishop is appointed.

Q. What are your early impressions about the Diocese of Saginaw and its people?

A. "I've discovered there are people here who are deeply committed to the Lord, following the Lord and being faithful to the Church. I've found here, as you find in every place these days, a sense of sadness at the scandals that the Church has been faced with. But in the midst of those scandals, I have a sense that people are able to look beyond that and see the work of the Lord truly being done in our midst. It's been a sense of excitement for me, finding people

here so welcoming and so committed to the Church and working hard to proclaim the Gospel."

Q. You've mentioned before that you see your role as walking with the people of the diocese. What does that mean and in what ways do you see yourself doing that?

A. "I think one of the key things for anyone in leadership is to be present to people in whatever it is that's happening in their lives. That's the way I see my presence here: to walk with the people in the Church, to

do the work that we need to do to proclaim the Gospel, to be willing to listen to the concerns of people and to be a minister of joy and hope in the midst of difficult times."

Q. What would you like the people of the diocese to know about you?

A. "I've been a priest now for 53 years and I've been a bishop for a little over 15 years. The last 53 years have been marvelous years. I feel a deep commitment to the service of the Church. I have always done the things I was asked to

do and have been very happy in responding to those invitations and requests. I've found great joy and excitement in that.

I come from a family of six children. I have a sister and a brother who are deceased, and I have three sisters who are still living. They're the ones who keep me grounded, keep me honest and don't let me get away with anything.

I grew up in New Brunswick, Canada, in a city called Fredericton. When I was about 17, our family moved to Detroit. My father was looking for work, and he had relatives who were in Detroit and suggested we move there. It's been wonderful. I've enjoyed, tremendously, my years of the priesthood."

Q. Are there any past experiences you have had that you believe will be particularly helpful during your time in the Diocese of Saginaw?

A. "We always bring the totality of our lives to a situation. You use the gifts that you have and the limitations that you have in the service of the people. It certainly has been helpful to have been the bishop of the Diocese of Grand Rapids as I come into a different diocese, and so you're not starting at point zero. Ultimately, we learn from our experiences. We learn from our mistakes and you build on your successes as best you can."

Q. While serving as the Bishop of Grand Rapids, you spear-headed revitalization efforts and sought to make the Catholic Church more visible to the broader community. In your view, what should be the role of the Catholic Church in the larger society?

A. "The Church has an important voice to offer in our society, and it's

the message of God's love and God's mercy. Historically, you can go back and you can say that the Church exercised an excessive control over civic societies in some of the European countries, but I would say the Church needs to be a player at the table because we have a contribution to make to society and to the local communities in which we find ourselves.

For example, it seems to me that the Church in the Diocese of Saginaw has made important contributions to life in the city of Saginaw and the various counties that make up the diocese. I think a good example would be the commitment to renovate the cathedral in the middle of downtown Saginaw. It's a commitment to this community that the Church is here."

Q. What led you to choose your Episcopal motto, "Serve With Gladness" (Ps. 100:2)? How does this motto guide you?

A. "I had a very good friend of many, many years who was the auxiliary bishop of Detroit, Bishop Arthur Krawczak, and he had chosen 'Serve with Gladness' as his motto. Part of my choice of that motto was because of my great respect, admiration and love for him.

I also think that there's a joy in doing the Lord's work, and it's important for us to recognize that. We need to serve the Lord not begrudgingly, but to do it in a spirit of gladness with a sense of excitement about it, and to be people who bring hope. It's a wonderful psalm, Psalm 100, that that's taken from."

Q. What drew you to the priestly vocation? What are some of your favorite aspects of serving as a priest and bishop?

A. "As I was growing up, I had always wanted to be a priest because

I had admired so very much the pastor in our local parish. He, in many ways, was a model for me. He cared deeply for people and he was a leader within the community. That's always what I wanted to do. There's been lots of challenges along the way, and I've always enjoyed those. It's been a wonderful journey, it really has.

I especially enjoy the liturgical celebrations and all that leads up to them. I found, for example, Bishop Cistone's funeral to be a very prayerful, moving experience. During the ordination of Deacon Marc Hopps, I was very mindful of myself back some 54 years ago being ordained a deacon and never being able to imagine where my life would have taken me. I enjoy those liturgical celebrations because they help you to look back, but they also help you to look ahead as well.

I also enjoy some of the challenges that go with administration. With good administration, people are better served. It's a matter of making sure, first of all, that we are sensitive to the needs of the people that we are serving and that we have the strength, determination and vision to do what needs to be done."

Q. Do you have a favorite Scripture passage?

A. "There's a passage in St. John's Gospel where Jesus says to his disciples 'When I was young, I went about as I would, and then when I grew older I stretched out my hands and they took me to where I would not go.'

That particular passage has always been important to me in this sense: as we grow in our faith and as we grow in our commitment, it's important to us that we go where the Lord wants us to go and we let the Lord take us where he's going to take us." †