

**Dear Family:**

Today is our 12<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary. It's been a memorable one. (And seeing *The Da Vinci Code* last night has nothing to do with it.)

I expressed concern in last month's letter that the loss of our bishop to the stake presidency was likely to mean a fourth year of my teaching seminary, as it's doubtful that his successor would have "Replace Incumbent Seminary Teacher That Everyone Seems To Think Is Doing An OK Job" anywhere near the top of his priority list.

It's not that I don't enjoy teaching seminary. I enjoy it a great deal. But it can be taxing at times. I've had the same conversation with myself at this time during each of the last two years. I tell myself that this has been great and all, but that I can't go on living like this and that this has to be the end. Then invariably the year ends. I step away from it for a couple days. I forget how demanding it was. I remember only how good it felt and how happy it made me. I resume the auto-conversation, this time, however, convincing myself that, yeah, I could do that again.

I'm fairly certain that, given the opportunity, things would have played out essentially the same way this year. But we'll never know for sure.

It would be untruthful of me to say that upon learning of the impending loss of our bishop, it never even occurred to me that his successor—the nameless jerk who, without consulting me, was just going to leave seminary on auto-pilot—might, in fact, be me. The thought had occurred to me. It was not, however, a thought that I entertained seriously. Every time I get on an airplane it occurs to me that we might crash. But I board anyway; comforted in the understanding that the probability of such an outcome is almost immeasurably small. And I assigned analogous odds to the whole bishop question.

By now—even if you're one of the 10 people on earth that my dear mother hasn't spoken to about this yet—you know how this story ends. Perhaps you'll indulge me a little longer anyway.

Three Fridays ago, Crystal called me at the office to tell me that she had just received an intriguing call from President Elwell (our outgoing bishop). He told her that he wanted to make sure he got me released as seminary teacher before his release and that he needed some information for a form that had to go to Salt Lake. Now, that last sentence contains two independent clauses. But, lawyer that he is, President Elwell said the two things in close enough proximity to one another that one could be forgiven for thinking that the Salt Lake form was somehow related to seminary.

I, of course, knew better. I knew that no form went to Salt Lake to release seminary teachers. Furthermore, seminary teachers aren't

even released. They aren't released because they're not really ever called. They're appointed to one-year terms. These are frequently renewed several times. But you no more release a seminary teacher than you release a Congressman. Both serve for a fixed term, and then they're either re-nominated or they're done.

Armed with that knowledge (and the knowledge that bishop is the only local calling that requires First Presidency approval) I started getting suspicious a couple of weeks ago, all the while finding it difficult to believe that a guy who's never been in an elders' quorum presidency, who hasn't had a PEC calling in six years (since I was released as Ward Mission Leader), *a guy who wears shorts and sandals to General Conference priesthood sessions for crying out loud* (it's dark in there) would even be considered for something like this. My suspicions, however, were all but confirmed last Saturday afternoon at 3:00 p.m. when the stake executive secretary called to ask if Crystal and I could meet with the stake president at 5:00 p.m.

He interviewed Crystal first, presumably to ask what kind of husband/father I was, and then the two of us together (interestingly, never me alone). Then he extended the call. He showed me the letter signed by the First Presidency authorizing him to call me to succeed William C. Elwell as bishop of the White Oak Ward. Seeing my name on the letter was surreal. It's kind of like that feeling of nervous excitement you get reading your mission call. But different. After all, I hadn't submitted an application for this. I was then informed that I had four hours to choose my counselors.

Everything was supposed to happen last Sunday. The high council approved my counselors early that morning and phone calls were placed. Mom, Dad and Pete came down from Moorestown. But it was all for naught. My first counselor was out of town and could not be reached. So it was pushed back to today.

This time Dad came alone. (Today was seminary sacrament meeting in Moorestown and Mom had to speak.) He stayed long enough to ordain me a High Priest and then joined the stake presidency in the circle as the stake president first ordained me to the office of bishop and then set me apart as the bishop of the White Oak Ward.

Now the hard part begins. I spent most of this afternoon in my new office getting briefed by my predecessor on welfare cases and I feel thoroughly overwhelmed. My only solace comes in the knowledge that this is the Lord's work, that He is in control, and that it will never fail, regardless of the boneheads who get called to be bishops.

Now, a small detail of family life, just so that you can't say that this entire letter has been about me. We regularly pray as a family that Sophie will learn to go poo in the potty. When it's her turn, Sophie prays that Grace will stop going poo in her diaper. So there. Happy Memorial Day.

Love,  
T, C, H, L, S & G

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