



Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Ten years represent a good part of anyone's life. That's pretty much how long I've been your Archbishop. In some ways it seems like just yesterday that I arrived in Hartford in December of 2013. In other ways, it seems like long ago and a lot of water, as they say, has passed under the bridge.

Life today presents many daunting challenges, especially for the Church. I am grateful for the understanding and support of you, our Catholic people, and the collaboration of so many talented, dedicated and competent individuals—clergy, religious and laity—all of whom have made these ten years possible and dare I say, fruitful, in the sense of bringing forth good for the glory of God and the salvation of souls. All of our priests in

particular are owed a debt of gratitude as my closest and indispensable co-workers in shepherding, sanctifying and teaching the flock entrusted to us.

There are many things that I could say about all that has happened over the past decade. Let me just highlight a few significant things.

As for so many dioceses in our country and throughout the world, "pastoral planning" looms large over these last ten years in an effort that is still "a work in progress" to revitalize parish life by bringing parishioners together as they are today, not as they once were in the past and are no more. The same can be said of our schools, which are now enjoying new growth and vitality in keeping with their Catholic identity.

The Scriptures, and Jesus Himself, praise good stewardship. On behalf of all those who have benefited, I want to thank everyone for your generosity over the past decade to your parish, to special collections, the Archbishop's Annual Appeal and the "Forward with Faith" capital campaign, as well as Catholic Charities and many other "good works" that are an essential part of a life of faith.

More than one saint has spoken of the fact that in a mystical sense Christ continues to be crucified until the end of time. Remember how even after His Resurrection, Jesus mysteriously still bears on His body the marks of His wounds. His mystical body, the Church, suffers from betrayal and sin. In our own time nothing shows this more than the sin and crime of sexual abuse of the vulnerable. I can only say that leaving no stone unturned we now have the benefit of knowing that all clergy with some connection to the Archdiocese who have either had a credible claim of sexual abuse of a minor asserted against them, or who have been the subject of a claim of a sexual abuse of a minor that was settled by the Archdiocese, have been identified and their names published. Learning from the past, we remain ever vigilant and proactive in preventing this evil, and we pray for the healing of victims.

My brothers and sisters, the times in which we live are a test of hope. Many people are discouraged by the direction in which our country and the world appear to be headed. In the Church too we witness a diminishment of faith and practice, and are stunned at the reality of sin even among those of us who are clergy. And if we are true to what the Church teaches from Christ and the Gospel about faith and morals, we will quickly bring upon ourselves the world's criticism.

Yet in all this, as Pope St. John Paul often reminded us, we have no reason to lose hope, or to falter in our steps, or to put on a glum face. Hope is possible to the extent that we place our trust in Christ's promises rather than anything this world has to offer. If our hope was set on a perfect world, or even a perfect Church, created by human beings, then we would have cause for despair. But God is the Lord of the world and of the Church. Mysteriously He makes all things—good and bad—serve His plan and purpose, which is the triumph of His kingdom, and our triumph to the extent that we are “in Christ.”

God does not disappoint. Like a distant horizon, our future and the purpose of our life may elude us, but only because the goal transcends what we now can see. The danger is not that life is hopeless. The danger, as St. Augustine says, is that on our journey toward hope's goal we may become so distracted by our surroundings that we forget where we are headed. In this fallen world sometimes the distractions of life consist of things that are very good, sometimes very evil. Only a healthy sense of hope in the midst of good and evil keeps us moving forward on our journey to God.

The wisdom of these words does not come from me, but from the heart of the Church—from the Catholic Faith handed down faithfully and lived heroically by all the saints, whether they are saints on the Church calendar, or God's little ones hidden and known only by their relatives, neighbors and friends.

It is this hope-filled message that I wish to leave with you as I complete my ministry as your Archbishop. To all those who offered me their help, support and encouragement; to those who gave me that precious gift we call “the benefit of the doubt” amid all the voices raised in troubled times; to those who have prayed with me and for me; to those who had a heart for the whole Archdiocese as one family of faith; and above all to those who strive every day to live and bear witness to their Catholic faith in Christ to the best of their ability, I say: Thank you and God bless you.

As we welcome Archbishop Christopher Coyne as the next Archbishop of Hartford, may Mary our Mother, St. Joseph, and Blessed Michael McGivney, intercede for him, so that, in the words of the liturgy, “what he has received by divine commission he may fulfill by divine assistance” for the glory of God and the good of souls.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leonard P. Blair". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

Most Reverend Leonard P. Blair
Archbishop of Hartford