

ON MY RETIREMENT David L. Edwards

June 7, 2015

This morning I have a difficult word to share. Difficult for me to say. Perhaps difficult for you to hear. I have decided to retire from active, vocational ministry, and from my work with you as minister. Within a year, Kaye and I will move to Kentucky, where we will live near the Sisters of Loretto Motherhouse.

Several important factors have been part of this decision, which has been brewing for a couple of years. I have some physical health issues that play a part, that increasingly limit my energy and ability to work in a way that is fulfilling. This change will enable us to live much closer to our families. My two sisters in Indianapolis. Our daughter Shelley and her husband Tim, and our granddaughter Arabella, in Greenfield IN. And Kaye's sister in Paris KY. The desire to live closer to family at this point in our lives has grown stronger in recent years.

We have chosen to live near the Loretto Community's Motherhouse because is it a place and community that has meant a great deal to us through the years. Kaye has been a Co-Member of the community for 34 years. I have been a Co-Member for about 15 years. My retreats there and at the nearby Abbey of Gethsemane throughout my ministry, and friendships and conversations with the women of Loretto have refreshed, sustained, and brought growth in me, often at very difficult times in my life and work. My experience at Loretto is largely the reason I wanted to be part of establishing a retreat center here, as our community's ministry of hospitality. When the time should come that we need it, the facility at Loretto offers excellent and compassionate care. I must add that my decision to retire has nothing to do with any unhappiness with this community. The far opposite is true. Being a member of and serving this community has been the pinnacle of my life and work as a minister.

I do not want to say much more at this point, for this will need time to sink in, and for us to move through whatever we need to move through in order to get to work on a time of transition. The Covenant and Community Members will begin to open their hearts and minds to the wisdom and leading of God's spirit. We will all need each other's support and prayers. I will be here long enough for conversation and discerning, and offering whatever help I can.

I do want to say this. The Covenant and Community Members, and those who are

considering and moving toward a commitment, are the core and heart of our community. They share a willingness to bear responsibility for the life and continuing vision of this community, bringing to it the energy, wisdom, patience, and love of those who are committed to and working faithfully with their own spiritual lives. You as a community already, right now, have everything you need to be the Church of the Covenant Community, to fulfill the vision, mission, and life to which this community has been called for sixty years. You lack nothing. And, I hope and believe that in the coming months you will begin to see clearly, if you do not see right at this moment, that God is already present and working in and through you to bring about the life and ministry God's love. I hope you will continue to grow in spirit so that you will perceive and celebrate, more and more, what is already in you and among you, while opening to the new people and visions and ministries that may, and will, emerge.

I want to say, finally, how incredibly grateful I feel for the years I have been part of this spiritual community. I will continue to be part and supportive of this community, which has shaped my life so deeply and richly, and which, I believe, has so much to offer to the world.

Let us now be together in a time of silence, resting in the presence and love of God, and preparing to present our offerings and to share together the bread and cup of Jesus, as his community here and now, and in the future.

#### PREPARATION FOR COMMUNION

Though it may not be easy, given what I have shared with you this morning, I would like for us to give our attention to what we are about to do, as a community of faith, in light of the reading from Mark's gospel.

Jesus was in a house teaching, a familiar and favored setting for him. His mother and siblings come looking for him. In the section leading up to this scene, his family is searching for him because they fear he is out of his mind! (When we start taking the spiritual life, the life of faith, seriously on a daily basis, not as a kind of religious hobby but as a way of life, we risk having others, including family members, think we have gone off the deep end.) When he is told that his family is at the door, he simply asks, "Who IS my family?" That is an important question. He looks around the room at those seated on the floor listening to him and talking

with him, and he says, “Here is my family. My family is made up of everyone anywhere who is doing God's will.” That is an amazing statement!

In a moment we will sing a very lovely hymn by the New Zealand hymn writer Shirley Erena Murray. It was inspired by this story, and by her experiences attending a meeting of the World Council of Churches. At that meeting, she met all kinds of people from different cultures and with different abilities, all brought together by their love of God which they learned through Jesus.

Murray's hymn says that all who gather around Jesus are our family. Actually, Jesus did not exactly say that. All who love and strive to serve God, whoever they are, wherever they are, and, yes, whether or not they are Christians—these all are our family. When we are working daily in our inward lives and our outward lives to touch and express God's love, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, and peace, we will find brothers and sisters, and mothers and fathers, and cousins and aunts and uncles, all of those in whom we recognize this love of God expressing itself in their lives.

So, we are a community that gathers around Jesus. That is important--to commit to and grow deeply into a spiritual tradition that awakens us to our true selves and to the life of love. For when we continue on that path, we will then discover that larger family Jesus was talking about. A family not based on blood relations, on culture, or even having the same religion, but on the life of justice, compassion, mercy, forgiveness, service ... the life of love. That is the will of God.

Now let us gather around Jesus, and know his mysterious, living presence with us, in this simple yet profound meal we share. Sharing the bread and the cup, remembering him, renewing our lives and our life together as his followers who are learning day by day what it means to do the will of God. That is why we are here. That is why the Church of the Covenant will always be here, as long as God calls us to be here. As long as we do this, we will find in and with each other that ever-widening circle of family, composed of all who love and serve God.