

# Change

## *The essence of life*

*“Change is the essence of life. Be willing to surrender what you are for what you could become.”*

—Jawaharlal Nehru

Reflection by Bishop Gibbs

As if the change of seasons isn't enough to adjust to, each Fall and Spring we must take time to reset our clocks back one hour or ahead one hour, changing from standard time to daylight saving time. When we pass from one liturgical season to another, vestments and altar hangings are changed: green, blue, white, purple, red. Inevitably as winter takes hold in the Midwest, our outdoor “gardening” activities will change from lawn-mowing to snow-blowing. As one day sets and another one dawns, we change from sleep to wakefulness and hopefully give thanks for another gift from God.

Change is indeed the essence of life but our move into and through change is often overwhelmed by our fear of letting go of that which was.

At our Diocesan Convention I spoke to my concerns about our apprehension about change.

Some of the most deadly words in the Church are: “but this is the way we've always done it.” A greater barrier to mission and ministry has yet to be revealed. But, please, check your perception of what I am saying! I am not a proponent of change simply for the sake of change. Rather, I advocate that change is a reality of life. Not long ago, a scientist reminded me that all living organisms must change; if they do not, they die!

I believe that the Church is a living organism, instituted by God and in-

fused with the life-giving Spirit of God. If the Church is to remain vibrant, relevant, and responsive to God's call, then she must always be prepared to change. As the Body of Christ, the living breathing organisms who are the Church are thus accountable to keep the body fed by word and sacrament, clothed with a spirit of honesty and truth, and open to embrace God's continuing revelation of the mission we are called to serve.”

In order for us to serve God's mission we must be the primary agency of change. Often it is not our surroundings that need first to change; rather it is us who need to change. Our attitudes, our perceptions of that which is outside us, our commitment to community, our honoring and respect of others—all are things that we can and must change if we are to become who God has called us to be.

Change is not easy. Just look at the history of our own Church! How long shall we continue to proclaim “The Episcopal Church Welcomes You!” and internally mean “only if you are like me”? How long shall we allow glass ceilings of every ilk to keep qualified and called individuals from exercising the ministry God has put before them just because we disagree with their politics, their skin color, or their God-given personhood? Just how long will we continue to call a 30-plus-year-old Prayer Book “the new Prayer Book” while we wring our hands wor-

rying about when “they” might get it into their minds to change it again?

Surrender is not an action we do very well. We are an independent people who seem, at times, to have forgotten their complete dependence on God! And when God calls us to change, we whine, fuss, argue, accuse, and otherwise find ways to hold onto who we are rather than taking a step toward who we can become. Alas, without change, the living breathing organism we call self will die. Alas, without change, the living breathing organism we call Church shall surely die!

In a few short days, the people of the world will gather in various ways to mark the change from the year 2009 to 2010. In those final seconds of countdown from one year to the next, most change will be too insignificant to behold. However, as people of faith, the one thing we can count on that can calm our fear of change is that our God never changes. Our God loves us unconditionally! Our God continually offers us the opportunity to step forth from what is to embrace what can be. I pray that as individuals and as a diocesan community we can find ways to accept a surrender of what we have allowed ourselves to become so that we can embrace what God desires us to be. It is in that mode of surrender and embrace that we can appreciate change and discover the new life offered by God.

May it be so!