

## **Bishop's Appeal 2010 Homily**

Hello my brothers and sisters in Christ. This is Bishop David Ricken. I am so happy to have the opportunity to speak to you today about being *Called to Serve* by God.

We never know how God will call us. I remember as a child being in Church one day, watching the priest distribute Holy Communion, and having an inner sense that God would be calling me to be a priest. Little did I know that that call would lead me to be with all of you.

Our wonderful scripture readings today challenge us to listen to that call of God, and respond. God called Isaiah to serve as a prophet, even though he had unclean lips. God brought Isaiah healing, and he responded to God by saying "Here I am, send me!"

St. Paul was called even though he thought of himself as the least of the apostles. He was not one of the original twelve. He had never met Jesus in the flesh. In fact, he had been persecuting Christians. Yet God called him to serve as the great evangelizer. What a difference Paul's life made in spreading the faith, once he was *Called to Serve*.

Then we come to the Gospel, with the great story of Jesus calling Simon Peter. Peter's first response is "I am a sinful man." When he hears Jesus' words, "Do not be afraid," he leaves everything and follows Him.

In my time with you as bishop, I have been amazed at the many ways in which God has called people to serve here in our Diocese. From our Catholic schools and faith formation programs, to our outreach to the poor and homeless, to our health care institutions and our pastoral care in parishes, many have responded to the call to serve. Among these are lay faithful being formed in the Commissioned Ministry Leadership Formation Program, men preparing for service as deacon in our parishes, and outreach done on our behalf to those who are struggling through the ministry of Catholic Charities. All of this is made possible in part because of your support of the Bishop's Appeal.

Today I invite you to join even more deeply in the service of God through your participation in the Bishop's Appeal. Sometimes, like Isaiah, or Paul, or Peter, we don't know how to first respond. The Bishop's Appeal is a faith opportunity to serve God's people in northeastern Wisconsin. In addition to our major calling or vocation in life as a married person, single person, religious, deacon or priest, you and I are called to serve on a daily basis. Support of the Bishop's Appeal is a concrete way of saying yes to God every day and serving those less fortunate.

Through your support of the Bishop's Appeal, we are able to train ministers to serve our parishes. The Commissioned Ministry Leadership Formation Program has formed 229 Commissioned Ministers since 1987. The Discipulos de Cristo Program recognized 17 people at its first Ceremony in the spring of 2009. Today, the Commissioned Ministry Leadership Formation Program forms 60 people in English language while the Discipulos de Cristo Program forms 51 participants in Spanish. Others are praying and learning as they prepare to serve as deacons for our diocese. Our deacons, called in a particular way to serve, are so vital in our Church today. These people, preparing for lay ministry and diaconate, will join others preparing for religious life and priesthood to serve the needs of the Church. Support of the Bishop's Appeal allows this education and formation to take place.

During these difficult economic times, some of us struggle financially due to lack of adequate employment or loss of investments we had been relying on. Through budget counseling offered by Catholic Charities, we are helping other families and individuals create a blueprint to help them meet these challenges. Again, it is our support of the Bishop's Appeal that allows this to happen.

Isaiah, Paul and Peter had many reasons to be afraid of the call to serve. Yet each of them trusted in God and responded with a strong "yes." Isaiah became the great prophet of the Old Testament, and Peter and Paul become the twin pillars of the apostles of the Church.

You and I, too, are called to respond generously and see where God will work as a result. So many wonderful things happen in our Diocese because of your generosity. I ask for your continued support of the Bishop's Appeal, so that we may continue to serve God and His people. In hard times, we may need to trust the Lord even more as He tells us "Be not afraid."

I continue to marvel at God's call in my life. I keep discovering so many ways in which so many people respond to that call. May we encourage one another to be good stewards of prayer, service to the Church and generous sharing. May our contribution to this year's Bishop's Appeal be a concrete way in which we respond generously as servants of the Lord. At this time, I would encourage your pastor to say a few words about the Bishop's Appeal. Thank you so much again for your support, and may God bless you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.