
A Special New Year's Day Message from Lincoln Hanks

Pepperdine Human Resources <humanresources@pepmail.pepperdine.edu>

Mon, Jan 5, 2026 at 10:00 AM



Human Resources



I often approach the New Year with a sensibility from my youth, raised as I was in the severe weather of rural Iowa. In that world, this time of year was truly the "dead of winter." By January 1st, the excitement of the first snow had long passed, the glow of Christmas was fading, and the winter wonderland had dimmed. We were just plain cold and longing for the next season.

I remember one such New Year's Day when I was visiting relatives just outside of Muscatine, in the heart of the heartland. I was about ten years old. I stepped outside the old farmhouse, where my parents, aunts, uncles, and cousins were finishing lunch, and ventured into the middle of the adjacent, desolate cornfield. I walked for several minutes into that openness and began to open my senses to the cold, the quietude, and my aloneness. Eventually, I began to feel the goodness of that solitude; in that moment, only God walked with me.

Later in life, I found a poem by Wendell Berry that perfectly captured the essence of that memory. In his poem "The Cold," he writes: "How exactly good it is to know myself in the solitude of winter,

my body containing its own warmth, divided from all by the cold.” But the end of the poem offers an amazing *volta*: “And having known fully the goodness of that, it will be good also to melt.”

Living here in these usually warm and dry climes, we are not seasonally given the opportunity to experience that cold aloneness. Yet, I still feel those emotions every January 1st—the cold created by the stresses of the fall semester and the deadlines that drove me into a lonely silo by the end of the year. But now, we look forward to the melt. We have an opportunity to open ourselves again, making ourselves vulnerable to each other and to God’s will. As Ezekiel 36:26 says, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

In this new year, after our winter and the aloneness we may have endured, may our hearts melt and be supple again, open to the companionship we share in our work and in our walk with the Lord.

Lincoln Hanks

Divisional Dean, Fine Arts Division

Professor of Music

Seaver College

