



About the Author

The Reverend Robert Layne was born in Louisville, Kentucky. He served in the United States Air Force during the Korean Conflict. After his discharge, Father Layne enrolled in Bellarmine College (now Bellarmine University), where he majored in history and philosophy. In 1963, at the age of 30, he became the youngest candidate ever elected to the Kentucky state senate, but resigned his seat after one term and enrolled in Virginia Theological Seminary. First as a deacon and then as a priest, he helped to integrate segregated Episcopal parishes and public facilities. His ministries have included counseling suffering homosexuals, and pastoral work in several Kentucky and Kansas parishes. He and his wife share six children from their marriages. Readers may contact Father Layne at fatherbob1933@gmail.com.

About *Vintage Voice*

Vintage Voice is a monthly publication for retirees of the Episcopal Church who, in sharing their stories, help deepen the sense of community. We hope you enjoy these articles and find them helpful. Stories are published with the authors' permission. If you have a reflection about your life in retirement, consider writing for the *Vintage Voice*! Send your submissions to vintagevoice@cpg.org.

VINTAGE VOICE



Dear Reader, Be Prepared

by the Reverend Robert Layne

Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I would end my days in a nursing home. Yet, here I am, a permanent resident of a retirement community (a gentle euphemism for nursing home, rest home, old folks' home, old people's warehouse, sanitarium, and even asylum).

Through all my 87 years of life—with more than 50 years as a clergyman—I became well acquainted with the inevitability of growing old and the universal ultimate of dying. But, for some reason, I never internalized the possibility that I would someday spend my final days in one of those homes where old people go and wait to die. My parents and my wife's parents were cared for in our homes until they died. But now I'm surrounded by bedridden, wheelchair-bound, memory-lost, coughing, sneezing, retching, and merely existing souls with rapidly fading or vanished pasts and pointless futures.

It has been said that grief resulting from the death of a loved one is love with no place to put it. My grief, however, is over a past that is dead and gone, but won't die and depart.

Every photograph of past days filled with life, love, and laughter brings me real pain. Silly TV commercials advertising wonderful cars so easily purchased, yet all beyond my possibilities, remind me that I'm ever dependent upon others for transportation. Ads for lovely houses remind me of my lost home. Enticements for travel and exciting destinations only say "never again" to me. Romantic evenings of my love and me sharing dinner and good wine have ended forever.

All those moments shepherding the Lord's people, and proclaiming His good news, are over and done.

I could go on and on as the real grief goes on and on. With our home gone to another, our possessions sold at a garage sale, our car now the playful transport of a granddaughter, and our checkbook and financial control in the hands of a beloved daughter, the truth of being penniless, helpless, and useless is a constant specter over my days. "Getting old is hard to do!" I've heard it said many times, and I can assure you that it's true. Sometimes, it seems that those neighbors who are lost in oblivion are the most blessed.

Yet, thanks to that beloved daughter, my wife of 40-plus years and I remain together. We share our “final nesting place” at the nursing home with an ever-deepening love and devotion. We even have occasional moments of laughter and joy. The surroundings are pleasant and clean, and the institutional food is tastily edible. On occasion, it is even delicious. The staff that cares for us is caring, gentle, and devoted.

Although the grief for what was is ever present, the gratitude for what *is* remains equally constant. We try always to remember Psalm 42: “Why art thou so heavy, oh my soul? why art thou so disquieted within me? I will yet call upon the Lord, my God and my help.”

So every new day remains a wonderful blessing even without its past glory. But, sometimes, the day is painfully difficult. Dear reader, be prepared.

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