

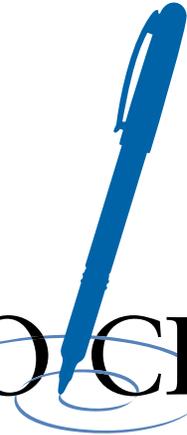
About the Author

After retirement from St. John's Episcopal Church in Randolph, Vermont, in 2010, the Rev. Timothy Eberhardt agreed to take on the 20-hour-per-week position of Spiritual Coordinator at Gifford Medical Center in Randolph. Here he serves as the Hospital Chaplain, overseeing the highly successful Volunteer Chaplaincy Program which he and five other parishioners began in 2000. Otherwise, in retirement, the Rev. Eberhardt loves country living on a hilltop in Braintree, Vermont, with his wife Mary Ellen Bean.

About Vintage Voice

Vintage Voice is a monthly publication written by beneficiaries of The Church Pension Fund. We hope you enjoy these articles and find them helpful. Articles 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



New Wine in New Wineskins

By The Rev. Timothy Eberhardt

Back in the late seventies when the Church Deployment Office required us newly ordained to fill out one of those computer forms with all the basics of our *curricula vitarum*, I remember it being emphasized that the one entry that mattered most was a box in which we were to condense, “tweet style,” the focused aim of our personal faith and ministry.

On the entire form, this one box was the one place where we could be “free to be me,” and sell ourselves as the wonderfully unique individual that any parish search committee would be dying to call. I still remember what I wrote there, something to the effect that “liturgy is life, giving hope and faith to a community at worship with the sacramental liturgy of the Eucharist at the heart of it all.” It sounded good and I meant it!

Whether any Bishop's Deployment Officer or search committee (or the Holy Spirit!) was ever moved by that thought, I will never know. Yet now, forty years later, as a part-time hospital chaplain in retirement after thirty-four years of service in two parishes, those thoughts sure came rushing back — at least the “liturgy” part, since here at the hospital I have gladly handed over all of the sacramental administrations of IVs, water jugs, and color-coded pills to the medical staff. But now, after months of working with a small committee that had worked to help the hospital incorporate a brand new chapel into its renovations, it fell to me to design a fitting liturgy for its dedication.

Suddenly, that long ago credo that I had penned for the Deployment people was taking on a fresh vision in my soul. I couldn't wait to make “the work of the people” happen with all the words and movement it would take to give expression to the spiritual role of the chapel at the heart of the hospital. Thus, as I sketched it all out in my planning, we would all gather out by the gift shop where there was lots of room with a piano for our Music Therapist Islene to play before and after. One of the doctors would give a tribute to the surgeon for whom the chapel had been named. Irene, our senior Volunteer Chaplain, would say a word about the “Spirit of Healing in this Place” before Volunteer Chaplain Chris with his booming Presbyterian voice would lead the assemblage in saying together the 122nd Psalm in procession to the chapel doorway.

Once there, Dan, the Hospital CEO, would pronounce words such as “Day and night, at all shifts, let this door be open that it might be a place...” Because not everyone would be able to fit into the chapel, Sheila, the chair of the Chapel Planning Committee, positioning herself half in and half out between the chapel and hallway, would continue with a prayer of thanksgiving for all who contributed to its completion. Psalm 91, again said by all, would be followed by the presentation and placement of gifts on the chapel table (“oblations” indeed!).

Scheming up this presentation of representative gifts was the fun part. Doug, the Facilities Director, would go first, placing the final plans for the chapel’s construction. Then Deborah, one of our Volunteer Chaplains, a member of the planning committee and a former architect, would place a tiny three-dimensional folded paper mockup of the chapel which she had designed. Paul, a local craftsman who had been contracted to fashion lit side panels, presented a piece of stained glass. One of the Hospital LNAs then presented a Bible, a Jewish nurse a Hebrew Prayer Book, and one of our Volunteer Chaplains a Qur’an (since we had no Muslim employees), and, finally, a night nurse laid down a stethoscope. The spoken formalities ended with a brief, non-sectarian prayer of dedication by me as Hospital Chaplain. The kitchen was contracted to provide finger foods for the reception back in the big entry area where we had started.

Forty years ago I tried to put into words my vision of liturgy in the Church. Little did I imagine that so many years later, the Holy Spirit would direct me onto a very different stage. The best part now is that it all worked. We did liturgy that day as a community, just as I had written forty years ago!