



About the Author

A graduate of Kenyon College and Virginia Theological Seminary, the Rt. Rev. William E. Swing was raised in Huntington, West Virginia. He served as a vicar at churches in his home state—and started a church at Waterford Race Track in Chester, West Virginia—before spending a decade as the rector of St. Columba's Church in Washington, DC, and 27 years as the diocesan bishop in San Francisco. The founder and president of the *United Religions Initiative*, Bishop Swing lives with Mary, his wife of 58 years, in Burlingame, California.

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



Retirement Gifts

by the Rt. Rev. William E. Swing

Since retiring as bishop of California, at the age of 70 in 2006, I have received three profound gifts:

First, I reclaimed my amateur status as a Christian. I have not attended another diocesan event; I preach or celebrate only once or twice a year; and I read scripture to feed my soul, not to prepare for a sermon. Every Sunday in our parish church, I get to sit in the pew beside my wife, Mary, as we savor the hymns and the community.

Second, I have been blessed with uncommonly good health. At 83, I still get a lot of daily exercise and I work full time, traveling around the world with the United Religions Initiative (which is in 110 countries) and attending staff meetings where I am decades older than most of my colleagues. Recently, I even had the chance to give a *TED Talk*—an experience that was both frightening and a hoot.

Third, I have forced myself (and have been forced by circumstances) to keep growing. For instance, although I was a decent writer before, I hired a writing coach. I'm happy to report that I have written two books that are now available on Amazon, *A Bishop's Quest: Founding a United Religions* and *The Sacred and The Silly: A Bishop's Playful and Eventful Life*.

The surprise factor has always governed the sacred, silly, and eventful life of this country boy from West Virginia. After attending Virginia Seminary, I spent my first eight ordained years in dirty steel towns near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, instead of serving in the little mission riverbank churches of my dreams.

I covered the five counties of the Bay Area as bishop of California for 27 years, working on matters of churches, clergy, schools, social ministries, and public concern. For the last 26 years, I have worked in Africa, the Middle East, Europe, Asia, and North and South America with people of all major (and many minor) religions, including numerous indigenous tribal people, all of whom taught me more than I could ever have imagined.

One day while I was in the office of former Secretary of State George Shultz, he asked me to write a chapter for a book about Andrei Sakharov, despite the fact that I knew next to nothing about this Russian dissident and nuclear physicist! Five months of research later, I finished the job (*Andrei Sakharov: The Conscience of Humanity*, Hoover Institution Press).

After becoming deeply involved in advocating for the abolition of nuclear weapons, I worked with some colleagues to create a YouTube *video* for the cause, and I continue to speak out at the United Nations and around the world.

This year, I was honored to be the co-keynote speaker with General James Mattis at Stanford's Hoover Institution, where our session was called "A General and a Bishop Speak on Accelerating Peace-Building."

Being a deacon, priest, and bishop across the globe for nearly half a century has left an indelible mark on my soul. This mark is yet another gift, and it continues to guide me as I attempt to serve God.



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