



### About the Author

The Rev. Hugh Stevenson was ordained in the Church of England and has served parishes in England, Hong Kong, Rochester, New York, and northern California. He and his wife, Angela, live in wine country, have a daughter on each coast, and two grandchildren in New York. His email address is [stvn2486@aol.com](mailto:stvn2486@aol.com).

### 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.

# VINTAGE VOICE



## Lost In the Forest

By the Rev. Hugh Stevenson

“What are you going to do when you retire?” I was asked on numerous occasions. It was a rhetorical question since my questioners usually wanted to add some well-meaning piece of advice, projections of themselves. Golfers said, “You’ll have more time for golf.” (This despite the fact that I have never played golf.) Cruisers said, “You’ll have more time to go on cruises.” Investors said, “You’ll have more time to manage your portfolio.” The Bishop said, “You’ll have time to do interims and offer Sunday supply.”

The truth is that in the months since my retirement I have not wanted to *do* anything. I *did* plenty in 43 years of parish ministry. I was over-invested in my parishes which, according to my wardens, I micromanaged. I discovered that if I wanted any task done “properly,” I had better do it myself. This resulted in parishioners being most willing to defer to me. I wish that Justin Lewis-Anthony had published his book, *If You Meet George Herbert on the Road, Kill Him: Radically Re-Thinking Priestly Ministry* (Mowbray, 2009), much earlier in my ministry.

Some repeated the cliché, “You will have so much to do that you will wonder how you ever had time to go to work.” Did they worry that I might be bored or at a loose end? I have found that now that I am not bound by meetings, appointments, and schedules, things take longer. I am no longer feeling driven, perhaps a little less compulsive, perhaps even a little mindful.

There is time to read Morning Prayer seven days a week in a more meditative way. For a number of years I have followed that with half an hour with an “improving” book. I have no responsibilities at the church I attend except to pray the service, sing the hymns, and receive the sacrament. Most weeks I write “Sunday afternoon thoughts.” I am also writing the words of sermons for each Sunday’s propers in Year B, which like those of Father Mackenzie, “no one will hear, no one comes near... What does he care?” From time to time our local congregation generously invites me to preach and celebrate.

Our local community college is an excellent resource. I have completed two semesters of Italian. People say, “When are you going to Italy?” They seem surprised when I tell them that is not why I am learning the language. It is an enjoyable way to keep my brain ticking over. So also has been learning (and performing) Bach’s “Mass in B Minor” in a choir at the community college. I work out industriously at the local gym six days a week. On Wednesdays, my wife, Angela, and I have taken up square dancing again after a 20-year break. I have not felt any need to volunteer, but now she has talked me into ushering at *Broadway Under the Stars*. I am not a member of any *kaffeeklatsch*, but meet with friends most weeks. In short, I am not doing anything useful.

Although my contemporaries are retiring along with me, they have not showed much interest in reflecting upon retirement. Jean Shinoda Bolen, the Jungian analyst, wrote in *Crossing to Avalon* that at times of transition (like retirement) we enter a dark forest, where we lose our bearings and question the meaning of what we are doing. “We lose what we once assumed was a permanent occupation or relationship” and “the familiar shelter of our usual place in the world.”<sup>1</sup> No longer are there clear sign posts for the direction of our lives; we have to feel our way. It may take as long as seven years in the forest for us to make the necessary inner changes. Making those changes is the one thing that is necessary.

<sup>1</sup> Jean Shinoda Bolen, *Crossing to Avalon* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1995), p. 148.