



About the Author

I was born in 1944 in St. Louis, MO, and grew up there. I graduated from Brown University in 1966 and earned an MA in education from Wesleyan University in 1968, the year Sara Hobart and I married. Our daughter and her family live in St. Louis where they are educators. Our son Peter is a new Episcopal priest, serving Holy Trinity Church in Wyoming, MI, nearby. We dog sit for him and his wife. I taught high school history in the inner city of Hartford, CT, and then in 1974, got my MDiv from Church Divinity School of the Pacific and was ordained in the Diocese of Missouri where I served at Grace Church, Kirkwood, until 1978 when I became Vicar and then Rector of Holy Cross in Kentwood, MI.

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. 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



Surprise

By Charles Homeyer

For years, I looked forward to my retirement. It wasn't that I didn't like my calling and work as a parish priest. Actually, I liked it very much. I liked almost everything about my variegated work. My people loved me and I loved them. I loved our worship. I loved doing pastoral care in some of the most heightened experiences of people's lives. I loved my colleagues and our weekly ecumenical preachers' support group. I loved our parish annual meetings and vestry meetings and other meetings. But after 35 years of focus on parish ministry, with the last 30 of them in one small place, Holy Cross Church in Kentwood (Grand Rapids), Michigan, it was enough.

I was ready for something else. I was ready to respond to God's call to a new stage in my life. First of all, I was ready to enjoy some retirement. I knew I could count on a good income from my pension, substantial savings, and Social Security. In February 2008, after having attended my second CREDO conference the previous fall and an Alban Institute workshop on ending long pastorates well, I announced my retirement for January 2009. In that time, I went about my job and saying my good-byes. It was some of the hardest and most important work of my life.

My retirement date occurred simultaneously with the change of leadership in Washington from George W. Bush to Barack Obama. It was at the time of Obama's inauguration. After spending the month of February at home, my wife Sara and I took a month-long trip to Florida and the American Virgin Island of St. John. As a lifelong and devoted baseball fan since the age of nine, going to see many spring training games in Florida was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream.

After Sara and I returned to our home on a little lake outside Grand Rapids (I called it my Golden Pond), I threw myself into writing memoirs, as well as volunteering at a city clothing bank and with a new inner-city collaboration of social service agencies. I was also a volunteer chaplain at a local retirement home and a member of the Bishop search team for our Diocese of Western Michigan, and in time, became a board member for a live stage theater we had long attended. Mixed in was a little more travel, to Lake Tahoe and to Cornwall, England.

Needless to say, retirement was starting off quite nicely. We went to fitness classes up to four times a week and my health was good, and although Sara suffered with some arthritis in her knees and type 2 diabetes, her health was good, too.

Then, in August 2009, only seven months after my retirement date, Sara went to an eye doctor appointment. The ophthalmologist who examined her sent her directly across town to a retina specialist, telling her not to stop along the way. Without warning she had developed the condition age-related wet macular degeneration in her right eye. It was, the doctor said, equivalent to a heart attack to her eye. Surprise!

Since that day, every four weeks, I have driven her to the retina doctor for injections of a drug called Eylea®. The wet macular degeneration also attacked her left eye. She had to give up quilting and reading, her two favorite activities, and her quilting blog, Sara's Scraps. By February 2013, she voluntarily gave up driving, requiring that I drive her to all of her doctors' and dentists' appointments, her Women's Chorus rehearsals and events, and many other activities for both of us.

Gradually, I was forced to give up all of my volunteer work, except for the weekly clothing bank every Tuesday morning, and also my annual baseball trips with friends and retreats to monasteries. Because I do all of the driving, cooking, and most of the shopping, I cannot really be away for more than a day, if that. Sara listens to audio books voraciously, and still attends exercise classes and breakfast meetings with friends, but I have to take her to all of these.

By late 2014, when I had turned 70, we were tired of all the driving; I was tired of all the caregiving. We started looking seriously at local continuum of care retirement communities. In August of that year, at my 70th birthday party, our landscaper and naturalist friend told us that he would like to buy our home and 4.5 acres of land on the lake. In early 2015, we sold it to him and bought into an independent living town home of 1,000 square feet at Clark Retirement Community in the city of Grand Rapids.

It was hard to give up our lake home. I am so grateful that we lived in that beautiful location for 23 years. But now, almost everything is so much closer. We enjoy the downtown volunteer work, theater, and symphony concerts, as well as all the restaurants and brew pubs in our neighborhood. I can even walk to some of them. And our present city neighborhood is such an interesting, wonderful mix of races and people, architecture, and funky businesses and eateries. Sara has taken up tutoring third and fourth graders at our local public elementary school only two blocks away. I still have my propane grill and bird feeders, and an attached one-car garage (a necessity in the snowy climate). The nearby main building has a chapel, fitness room, swimming pool and coffee shop, and it offers many good programs.

In 2017, I was elected to the Resident Council of Clark Retirement Communities. About six months later, I became its President, and with that, a member of the Board of Trustees of Clark. It is God's calling at this stage of my life to be able to utilize my experience and skills to chair Council meetings and our Task Force on the Resident Survey of Satisfaction and Engagement. Although it sometimes does seem like a lot of work for a 74-year-old man, I do enjoy calling others to use their charismas and senses of humor.

When the Trustees become almost blindly focused on finances and expansion, I repeatedly remind them that we are here to serve and enrich the lives of residents in skilled nursing, assisted living, and independent living. We are doing important work recommending to the administration and leadership how to improve communications, resident engagement at all levels of community life, assisted living quality of care, and the quality of dining and meals. My term on the Resident Council and Board of Trustees will end May 1, 2020. God will reveal my next calling and ministry after that. God is always a surprise.



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