



About the Author

The Rev. Richard Edwin Craig III was ordained to the priesthood in 1991 in San Antonio, Texas. He served many parishes and missions in the Dioceses of West Texas and Milwaukee. Father Craig has published two books and has other books for which he is seeking a publisher. He retired in 2006 but, like many clergy who are no longer officially “active,” he has been very involved in parish ministry. Father Craig resides in El Paso, Texas, where he and his wife, Dr. Marie Pascoe Craig, are grandparents. He can be reached at recraigiii@mac.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



Uncivil Rights

by the Rev. Richard Edwin Craig III

Not long ago, my wife of 53 years gave me one of the lessons that most Black men received in their youth: “Your job,” she said to me, “is to make it home to me each day.”

Heck! I’m a priest of The Episcopal Church. Is there even one reason to doubt that I will return home safely each day? Yes, there is, and more than one.

Hasty Judgments

For years I existed in a state of arrogance. I would declare that I could go wherever I pleased in this country. After all, I thought, I’m an American citizen. How many times did I sing the praises of the United States because Americans don’t have to present identification cards when they travel from state to state? If I were stopped by police and asked to produce ID, I was prepared to say that the Constitution does not require citizens to carry ID. Of course, this was before states began imposing their own card-carrying requirements.

But not long ago, I was confronted by police while I was carrying out a civic service. Motorists routinely run stop signs in my neighborhood, and I was filming these occurrences. I intended to put a win-win proposal in front of city council members. If police officers ticketed these dangerous drivers, the city would have an alternative source of revenue for the money it would lose by removing parking meters in the downtown area. Getting rid of those “curbside bandits” would encourage shoppers and help our city’s stores.

Bear in mind that while I was pursuing this self-appointed project at the intersection of social and economic betterment, I considered myself a citizen of that neighborhood. I had been living in the vicinity for a dozen years. Not only did a police officer arrive in a squad car, but he was accompanied by a multi-passenger transport vehicle—a patrol wagon, where people are placed when they are arrested. My “crime”? Someone had reported me as a suspicious person

I was not dressed in my clerical clothing, but I was wearing slacks and a nice sports shirt. My car was properly parked at the curb and sat a good distance from the corner. But look at the accompanying photograph. Then you may get some idea why I was adjudged by

some informant to be “suspicious.”

Troubled Testimony

I was once stopped by the police as I made my way from a city bus stop to my home in the small town of Leon Valley, just outside of San Antonio, Texas. As I walked down Bandera Road, a Leon Valley policeman stopped me. He quizzed me about where I was going. I confess at this time that the questioning infuriated me! I was not walking in the road and I was doing no harm to anyone’s property—and yet, I had to stop my journey home to answer some silly questions. At the time, I was working for the largest civilian employer in San Antonio, and my vice president was outraged! But what could he do?

What I report to you next makes the racial bias of that incident pale in comparison. I once worked for a property and casualty insurance company and traveled to central Florida to visit an agent who represented my company. I arrived at the agent’s office on time and presented myself. The secretary said that her boss did not have my visit on his calendar and he was out of the office. Further, she said, she did not know if or when he would return.

Later I learned that this agent called our regional vice president and said, “Don’t ever send a Black man to my office again.” I’m pretty sure that’s an edited account of what the agent actually said. The regional vice president then canceled the agent—he could no longer represent our company. That moment has lived in my heart all these years. The decency of the regional vice president is one of the primary reasons I am able to live as I suggested in my first book, *What Do We Do With Luke 6?* (PublishAmerica, 2004), and Jesus’ command to love our enemies.

Even people in the Church make assumptions. While I was serving as spiritual director for our bishop’s YES (Youth Encounter Spirit) weekend, I was talking with another priest in the gym of a parish church. A woman interrupted our conversation to ask if I were the sexton. While that is a noble ministry, one might wonder why she thought I, rather than the white priest, might be the sexton.

My accounting here would not be complete without mentioning that as I drove some 20 miles from Aransas Pass to Corpus Christi, Texas, someone shot at my car. Neither I nor my car was hit.

All that said, it doesn’t matter that I am a priest of the Church who attempts to live that life about which I preach and teach.

This is a testimony I am only now beginning to share outside of my family. Even now in these turbulent times, many find it difficult to accept such testimony. But like the author of the gospel according to John, I am telling the truth. There is more I could say, but I will stop here for now.



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