



About the Author

The Reverend Cynthia M. Spencer grew up in Minneapolis, Minnesota, as a member of the parish of St. Mark's Episcopal Cathedral. She earned a BA from the University of Minnesota in French and art history and an MBA from Golden Gate University, San Francisco, and graduated from General Theological Seminary, New York. Mother Spencer has served churches as rector, vicar, and interim pastor in Arizona, California, Michigan, and Pennsylvania. The author of *Losing Me, Finding Me* (Balboa Press, June 2019), she is prepared to publish a novel called *The Time to Love* this year. She especially loves her daily walks with her greyhound, Obi Wan Kenobi. Mother Spencer is engaged to be married. She lives in Tucson, Arizona, and Carmel Valley, California. She can be reached at cms614@me.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



My Name Is "Gives Bread"

by the Rev. Cynthia M. Spencer

This year I turned 76. I have retired three times from parish ministry. I still provide spiritual direction, lead retreats, write, create art, and try to inspire others by teaching them how to live a balanced life. I am no longer in the center of a community. It's easy to miss that elevated role. Is my job done?

I recently moved to the church that I currently attend for the sole purpose of finding community. And I found it! But it is hard to let go of the leadership role I have carried for so long within the Episcopal Church. Sometimes I thought I didn't want to go to church anymore. And I didn't. Somehow, though, I knew that isn't the core of who I am as a Christian, as a priest, or as God's child.

I know I still have an important role to play as a keeper of God's wisdom in our seemingly chaotic world. That's why, after all these years, I treasure my special name, "Gives Bread."

The Two Garys

Many years ago, I sat on my sofa listening to Gary, a 35-year-old parishioner, talking with the five-year-old son of a new member of our parish. The youngster was sitting on my living room floor. We were in the midst of a monthly Sunday brunch for newcomers, and, as the rector of the church, I was the host.

Gary introduced himself to the little boy and asked, "What's your name?" The child grinned from ear to ear and said, "I'm Gary, too!" Then Gary the Elder pointed to me and asked, "What is her name?" The little one looked up at me, hesitated, smiled, and said, "Gives bread!"

Little Gary associated me with the consecrated bread he had received at church. We give bread, the Bread of Life, the body of Christ. And what we give is not just little wafers, or broken pieces of pita bread. What we give has far more substance. We give God's love and acceptance.

Recently, I found an 11-page essay I had written in my junior year at General Theological Seminary. The topic was priesthood. I quoted John 19:20: "Receive the Holy Spirit, if you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained." These words

are written in gold leaf midway along the sides of the chapel at General Theological Seminary. I have lived with them vivid in my memory for more than 30 years.

All Christians are called to receive the Holy Spirit. All alike, we are called to forgive everyone, including ourselves. Making peace that we may live in the image of Eternal Love is everyone's purpose. I kept reading through my essay. In there, I had repeated in bold letters, RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT. My soul resounded with joy the more I read my own words! "Receive the Holy Spirit in the office and work of the priest in the church of God."

More to Do

Finding the old essay helped me to see myself and my role through a new lens. We were trained to be sacramentalist, servant, preacher, prophet, leader, unifier, educator, and administrator. We give the Love of Christ that the world might live in unity, peace, and everlasting love. But that love, which is manifested in us to give away, is not always received. We, too, have not always received the love of God.

We can empathize. That is why, as a member of the so-called Encore Generation (those of us over 60), I see us as the keepers of wisdom.

Jesus came to wake up people. He came to tell us that we have to awaken to the Holy Spirit that has created us, lives in us, and is here in us with great power—living through us and out into a world, where many do not recognize the love and beauty of life that is all around us, especially now, when life is scary and confusing.

I am seeing the power of Spirit moving through me in the various things I do with my life, and I am trying to be a model as an elder of the Spirit-led life. I have just lost 135 pounds, finished a novel about my six years working for a hospice, and am working on patience and learning to listen—and not talk—just waiting upon the Lord, being still.

God says I AM, and I know that GOD IS! And I know that God isn't done with me yet. I am still called to be one who "Gives Bread," the Bread of Life, the Love of Christ, which is manifested in me for the purpose of sharing it with the world. I am still blessed to be she who "Gives Bread."



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