

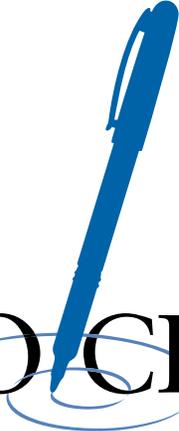


### About the Author

Judy Wright Mathews, widow of the Rev. Lex S. Mathews, retired from The Church Pension Fund's Pastoral Care office, after first working for Presiding Bishops Edmond Browning and Frank Griswold. Upon retiring, she returned to Tallahassee, Florida. Judy works in her parish food pantry, and keeps up with two children, three grandchildren, and four great-grandchildren by email. She is an active member of Holy Comforter Church, Tallahassee.

### 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. If you have a reflection about your life in retirement, consider writing for the Vintage Voice! Send your submissions to [vintagevoice@cpg.org](mailto:vintagevoice@cpg.org).



# VINTAGE VOICE

## Our Church New and Old

By Judy Wright Mathews

“... My church, which has reflexively interpreted its world from a position safely within the categories of European experience — specifically, English experience, as if God himself were English — confronts the fact that an increasing number of members do not claim that experience as their heritage...”\*

— Edmond Lee Browning, 24th Presiding Bishop

Our Episcopal Church in these later decades has made some exciting changes. As a life-long part of the Episcopal Church, I have witnessed changes that I had not thought could — or even would — take place. As a clergy widow and having worked for our Church, I also know about the work that change requires as well as the heartbreak that it can cause.

I have been involved in parishes and missions and visited many more — from Alabama to New York. I have been a member of 16 congregations. I have not seen two celebrate Holy Communion, Easter, or Christmas using all the same details of our flexible liturgy. Growing older and maturing, I have learned that our Church is good, no matter the liturgy. I believe that most Episcopalians learn that a change in how we worship doesn't change what we believe.

Those who have left our Church will miss some of the developments that come from change. In the 1970s, some congregations left the established Episcopal liturgy when a new prayer book came into use in our churches. Again, early in this century, congregations left the Episcopal Church because of the consecration of a bishop, of one of God's children, who is a homosexual. Some who left because of changes have returned and are with us as Episcopalians.

The change of racial integration — as slow and small as it is — in our Church caused less negative reaction than many feared. I am fortunate to have had the influence of happy times during summers in the Diocese of Alabama's Camp McDowell. The lay woman who directed youth work for the diocese at that time told us at camp, in the 1940s, that we would be racially integrating our camp, and we should be prepared to do that in a Christian way. Despite growing

up in the racially divided South, that information stayed with me. I still think about hearing first from my Church that we would see that change. Now, with the Right Reverend Michael B. Curry serving as our Presiding Bishop, change speaks loudly to us even as we work for more inclusion.

My father served two congregations in our Church in the 1930s and '40s as a lay reader, vestryman, and Sunday School superintendent. In 1978, he was buried wearing a "Save the 1928 Prayer Book" lapel pin. At that same time, my husband and I were close friends with one of the clergymen working to revise the 1928 prayer book. I boldly sent my parents a copy of "Introducing the Proposed Book of Common Prayer (1976)" written by our friend, the Rev. Dr. Charles P. Price. Charlie Price was kind enough to autograph the gift. I have to admit that I don't think that gift did much good. My mother and father did not acknowledge the book. That *Book of Common Prayer* we now use was accepted and is in wide use. Now we are reading of proposals to change the current one. I suspect some of us who remember the controversy in the 1970s will simply realize we have "been there, done that" and accept the change. Another change is that *The Book of Common Prayer* is not being used as much in services, as many congregations use a printed service leaflet.

Certain changes are dramatic for some people, and I speak from experience. I saw a bishop wearing a mitre in my church for the first time in the early 1960s. I had grown up in a diocese with a liturgy that is considered "low church." I did not know that we ever used incense in the Episcopal Church. I did not see anyone in my church crossing himself or herself. Our bishops, priests, and deacons wore surplice and stole. I never saw a celebrant wearing a chasuble growing up in our Episcopal Church. I did love the colors of the seasons, and I particularly loved the green, which, as a child, I thought meant summer and time for play. Now, another change is the introduction of the color blue added to purple or violet. In many churches, the custom of congregants wearing red on Pentecost Sunday, and in others, acolytes wave dramatic red banners in the processions, a delightful sight. That has not changed, and I am happy about that.

Some changes come as a surprise. In the 1930s, I remember seeing my uncle serve as crucifer when my grandfather was rector of a parish in Atlanta. I never thought about girls being acolytes. That was not done. In the 1960s, my husband said one Saturday evening that we would have a young woman serve as crucifer the next day. I was surprised but very pleased. It didn't upset anyone as far as I know; however, that was at a university campus chapel, where most faculty and students accepted changes. This change, which brings enthusiasm and vigor to many of us, is that women now take a more complete role in our Church — from acolytes to bishops. In the early 1970s, when a woman was elected to the vestry in Chapel Hill, N.C., another woman in the parish said it would mean that men would not be as willing to serve on the vestry. I was pleased when that did not happen. Now, lay women continue to take their places as leaders in our Church as well. We see a stark record of women's ordination in our Church when we read the list of clergy deaths published each month. The list becomes longer for clergy women's deaths each month.

Some are still unhappy with our Episcopal Church. Conservative columnists still write predictions of doom for our Church. Yet, most congregations have changed from the Church of the last century to today's congregations feeding hungry street people, ordaining an African-American Presiding Bishop, and accepting all genders equally as children of God.

\* A Year of Days with the Book of Common Prayer  
by Edmond Lee Browning — the meditation for January 17



19 East 34th Street  
New York, NY 10016  
[www.cpg.org](http://www.cpg.org)