

# The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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## Joining the “Y” in My Senior Years

*The Rev. Lew Towler*

First, a bit of confession: When I was in the seventh grade at Roosevelt Jr. High in Charleston, West Virginia, I did everything I could to get out of gym. I offered my services as a cleaner of blackboard erasers. I also became a kind of messenger boy carrying notes from one teacher to another. As I said, anything to get out of gym.

There were several reasons for avoiding gym, but mostly I did not like the yelling and confusion that came with sports. In one game, with about thirty kids screaming at me, someone handed me a stick, and when I said, “Thank you,” the screaming increased. It was only later I found out I had stumbled into a relay race and was expected to run a lap or two with the stick in my hand.

When I got to high school in Springfield, Ohio (and yes, my family moved around a lot) things got a bit better. The head football coach was also the gym teacher, and, because his top priority was to produce a winning football team, he didn't pay much attention to what went on in gym class. Here, there was no need for me to clean blackboard erasers. I could easily and quietly disappear on the sidelines, looking busy doing deep knee bends while the jocks were playing volleyball.

During my three years in the U.S. Navy Seabees, I was forced into discovering that I had some modest jock genes after all. Every once in a while, a company commander would decide we needed to shape up and would get us out on the field to do jumping jacks and such. My participation was low-level but adequate. I also managed to do obstacle-course training, which included a fourteen-mile hike. I even managed to scramble down a cargo net when we invaded the island of Peleliu in the Western Pacific.

Then when I was all of fifty-five years of age, an amazing thing happened. I not only rediscovered my modest jock genes, I actually began to like some jock activities. I started to run in 10k races. Although I never broke the tape at the finish line, I do have certificates and a T-shirt to prove my ongoing involvement.

Now, fast forward to 2007. I am living in Ann Arbor, the town I first visited in 1946 when I became a freshman at the University of Michigan. I've carried my Medicare card for some sixteen years and have been receiving those most welcome Church Pension Fund checks for a bit longer.

I cannot say what nudged me to check out the local YMCA. It may have been the magnificent new Y facility. Perhaps my inner voice was saying, "Forget the past; it's never too late to get in shape." It may have been the Y logo, a triangle, looking to me like a symbol of the Holy Trinity. No matter, for there I was in a membership office, talking to a really neat lady about the advantages of "Senior Membership" (discount and special programs for seniors.) I took the membership brochures, read them through while asking myself, "Do you really want to do this?" followed by another question, "Will this be another thing you will start and not finish?" I weighed the plusses and minuses (actually writing them out on a big sheet of newsprint). Result: a decision to try it for a month.

At first, the young, lithe bodies put me off a bit. "I can never do that. I can never be like that," I thought. Then I began to realize that age was unimportant. What was important was for me to set my own goals and try to achieve them. So, a helpful trainer walked me through about six pieces of equipment, each with four or five levers and handles used to adjust the machines to my particular needs. It all seemed a bit formidable, but something within me said, "Keep going."

I am now in my second year of going to the Y three or four times a week. I do a fast walk for two miles on the track (actually, three tracks: one for slow, one for medium, and one for really, really fast joggers). I use something called NuStep (a kind of treadmill, only you do it sitting down, which I like). And, I exercise with the three or four pieces of equipment shown me earlier by the trainer. I have this wonderful feel-good feeling after I've spent ninety minutes at the Y, and although I am not up to the speed of the younger members, I have come to think of myself, at last, as a Senior Jock.



Lew Towler, already twice retired, is now Assisting Priest at St. Andrew's Church in Ann Arbor, a church he first entered while a freshman at the University of Michigan in 1946.

*Always seek the advice of a health care professional with any questions about your personal health care status, and prior to making changes in your approach to diet and exercise.*