

# The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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## Retirement Surprises!

*The Rev. Hal White*

Sally and I began contemplating retirement when our last child graduated from college and we turned 50. Sally's teaching salary had been dedicated to college education for our three children. All of a sudden we had no tuition bills! We decided to use her income to prepare for retirement by investing a portion in the stock market and doubling our house payments. It did not make sense to fritter it away on travel and other entertainment.

As a result of this big decision, when I turned 60, we were able to pay off the mortgage on our house. We had made some money in the stock market. This freed me to work half-time. So, after 20 wonderful years in the same parish, I was able to move toward retirement. I resigned as rector of St. Aidan's Church in Alexandria, Virginia, not knowing what I would do professionally.

Over the next four years, I was hired as a half-time pastoral associate in one church and interim in two other churches. The first was a corporate church where I taught, preached and counseled: perfect for me. The next two were half-time interims in small churches near where a contractor was building our retirement home. Half-time interim work is one of the best jobs in the church: someone else has the administrative responsibilities. Already we were experiencing the life-giving surprises of retirement.

In 2000, we moved into our new home on the water on the Northern Neck of Virginia. I had determined that a good balance of work and play in retirement was "working" two to three days a week and having the other days to play. "Work" to me meant volunteering, consulting and seeing therapy clients. Soon I found a small, new community, The Bay Center for Spiritual Formation. I became a board member and periodically led workshops. Then Sally and I were trained for Hospice Support Services, and she became the volunteer coordinator. I helped her out and, now and then, worked with a client. "William" was one: a ninety-year-old widower with cancer and a broken hip. He also was a Quaker, an avid reader and very much connected to the black community. We became fast friends, sharing books and stories and journeys. He taught me a great deal about moving into the last third of life. For instance, one day I asked him what word he would use to describe himself on that particular day. Realize, please, that his wife of many years had died three years previously, he had cancer and could not hear his beloved music, and was confined to a wheel chair. He had around-the-clock nursing care, essentially from the black community he had so long supported. He responded to my question by saying he was "satisfied." He continues to teach me.

After being retired for four or five years and being very active in the community, I became a bit bored and began to wonder what *else* God might have in store for me. I was highly energetic,

very active, and only 67! I continued to voice this question over several months. Tragically, a local high-profile person was killed in a terrible car accident. Through the hospice, I spent several years in grief counseling with his widow. Flyers for several grief counseling workshops came in the mail and caught my eye. New referrals for this ministry dropped into my lap. God began to get my attention. I continue this ministry to this day. In fact, I recently received another referral from a colleague with whom I had worked after her husband died.

Once more, I wondered casually whether there were something more with which God wanted my help in ministry. This was shortly after the Diocese of New Hampshire elected Gene Robinson, a gay man, as its bishop. Soon thereafter, St. Stephens Episcopal Church in Heathsville, Virginia, went through a very serious discernment process to determine if they were called to continue to be a part of the Episcopal Church. At the end of this process, so I am told, they voted approximately 70% to 30% to leave the Episcopal Church and affiliate with the Anglican Church of Nigeria. They were one of fifteen churches in the Diocese of Virginia which voted to leave their mother church. In late January 2007, I met with the reconstituted vestry of St. Stephens Episcopal Church. They were leading a group of 30-plus dedicated and faithful members. They asked me to be their part-time interim rector. I came out of retirement in February 2007 to be their priest and pastor. They have taught me so much, loved me deeply, and invigorated my life more than I thought possible. They soon developed a Vision and Mission statement and norms for their lives together. They have reached out to those in need in the community. Discovering that some four thousand homes in adjacent counties were without clean, drinkable, safe water, they launched an outreach program to provide clean water for those in need. Twelve of the thirty-something members were trained as hospice volunteers and continue to visit with and aid aging and struggling people in our county. They have raised over \$15,000 in two huge fund raisers, a significant portion of which goes to those in need. Just to worship in this small community on a Sunday morning gives me goose bumps!

Several months ago, the vestry and I agreed that it was time for them to search for a priest-in-charge who would serve for at least a three-year period, so that they could experience greater stability. While I will find it difficult to step down from a central role in this community of faith, I think the time is right for them as well as for me. These were my thoughts as I returned from two weeks of family vacation. Among a number of phone messages waiting for me was one from a priest colleague. A doctor friend of his who runs a radiation clinic for cancer patients wanted to find someone to facilitate a support group for men with prostate cancer. The priest recommended me. So I called him and listened to the proposal. At the conclusion of our conversation, I asked him if he knew that I had had my prostate removed last December. He had had no idea! He said that God's hand had to be in the midst of all this! I am dubious about wondering what else God has in store for me in retirement. Dare I ask the question again?



Hal White is an almost-retired Episcopal priest and a Licensed Professional Counselor in the State of Virginia. He served churches in Southern Virginia, West Virginia and Virginia. He lives with his wife, Sally, in Wicomico Church, Virginia.