

# The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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## Putting a Puzzle Together

*The Rev. Philip S. Krug*

Recently, my family decided to rent vacation housing in Bethany Beach, Delaware. Unfortunately, our tried-and-true daughter and her three children would not be able to come from San Francisco, but our three sons, their wives, and children all would be present.

There was no vacation home big enough for all of us. In fact, only two cottages were available. So we moved into them. What would living this close together again be like for us? Would any family habits be repeated? After all, Bethany had been a choice of the middle son, who had vacationed there before. He and the oldest often held different views. Our housing arrangements emphasized our family history. Lee, my wife, and I were in the downstairs of one cottage, with our youngest up above us. He was the sunny one who often seemed on a private journey. The oldest and the middle sons, despite their different views on things, had lived together during college and wanted to do so again in Bethany Beach.

“Up above us” decided on one of those thousand-piece puzzles. I was somewhat resistant to the idea of a gigantic jigsaw puzzle holding us all together. After all, how can you relax if your life is in a thousand pieces? Would the sons’ children, who were at the other cottage, be brought over to work on it? Furthermore, would today’s kids really be interested in a jigsaw puzzle when they were vacationing in a town with a lot of things to do? How can you come in from all the excitement of beach activities or seeing what’s going on in Bethany, grab a sandwich, and sit down to a puzzle? How in the world would they tackle a puzzle so large? Would they become discouraged? Even if they liked it, would there be enough pieces to last all week? As you can see, my “warp and woof” is to question everything!

I soon learned that kids were not challenged by the huge number of puzzle pieces. They probably would have been willing to work on a puzzle with two or three thousand pieces. And note that “work” is the word I used. To them it was fun. That was a surprise in itself, but not the only one.

They had tricks to show off — probably from previous experience. First, they made a pile of pieces that had flat or straight sides. These would become the puzzle’s frame. Next, they made a pile of pieces with the same color scheme. And then by looking at the completed picture on the box top, they got an idea of what fitted together.

Eventually — on the fifth day of our week’s stay — the puzzle was more or less completed. Yes, the two or three pieces missing must have somehow gotten between the sofa cushions, or under a rug, or purloined by a pet. But whether it was one hundred percent perfect or not, it was done. And another surprise: the puzzle brought all of us together!

Unlike a puzzle, we aren’t given a picture on a box top of how our life is supposed to turn out. I admit that at times I wanted to consult such a picture, but if I had been given one to follow, my life would have been terribly boring, and I would not have used what God gave me.

I think of how Jesus seems to be turning everything over in his thoughts and prayers, “What do you want of me, Father?” He takes what happens, like a thousand-piece puzzle. Like a man let down through a roof. Like a woman drenching him with a precious balm. You take what happens, and that leads to surprises sometimes.

There are lessons to be learned from a jigsaw puzzle, even down to the missing pieces. As I look backwards in retirement, pieces of my puzzle are missing, too. Would I have been happier had perfection been my goal? My only possible answer is that, if I had been perfect, I wouldn’t have been human (and I would rather be human).

Mistakes were made. I . . . we would all take in a deep breath before every new job, and also before retirement. I . . . we would be puzzled and challenged, yet given some confidence by what others told us, and what we could tell ourselves. Like a puzzle, some aspects of our lives may only be meaningful towards the end.



The Rev. Philip S. Krug lives in Montvale, New Jersey, with his wife, Lee Albert, and two cats. She is a writer, a psychotherapist, and was a member of the vestry. He has served three parishes, often been an interim and Sunday supply priest, and recently was priest associate for seven years. They are members of Christ Church in Hackensack.