

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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Moving

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From the time of our arrival in Cincinnati, we knew that we would depart in August 2005 when retirement was mandatory. Ten years was a proper tenure, but *no* age would be a satisfactory time for me to stop work; work was a central value.

Planning, circumstance and the grace of God dictated that we undertake a new challenge, but this did not solve the demands of dislocation. Everyone has moved at least once; we had done so more than a dozen times. Moving is difficult, but inevitable, if one is to move forward.

The complete uprooting of one's life is not an easy matter. Deep down, we know that we should move. The alternative — staying in the same place — could lead only to death.

Moving is also a death. The difference is that moving is a death we choose rather than the death that chooses us. Somehow, Anne and I decided to move toward the future, to make it happen, rather than waiting for it to happen to us.

When we first arrived in Cincinnati, a woman a year older than we and from one of the city's most established and wealthy families said, "I could never do what you have done — uproot and relocate yourselves at age sixty. I just couldn't do it." She had never lived away from the city where she was born.

Five years later, as she and I drove together to seek support for a worthy cause, she said to me, "No words can describe how grateful I am for my cancer. Without it, I would never have known how dependent my life — all of it — is on God. I have had good health, wealth, fulfillment and a wonderful family, but I never knew until I was afflicted with this disease that everything I have comes from God. In some ways, cancer is the greatest gift I have been given."

She meant it. When she died less than a year later, she did so with grace and positive intention, moving into a New World and a new life. Death was her final — and only — move. Her move had similarities with each one we each undertake.

Nevertheless our move from Cincinnati seemed more traumatic than any Anne and I had previously undertaken. Was it our age? Or the fact we were moving from the first house we had really owned and made our own? Was it the impending reality of making new friends at a time when most lives are winding down? We had invested ourselves in Forward Movement, and it would go on and on and on without us. It was all of this and more.

The physical process of the move itself was more work than we remembered. We worked together, every day, all day, for three full weeks, packing. This was traumatic in itself. We had done it before, but never completely on our own, going through each and every part of our life together, casting much away, watching what was left loaded on a great truck and taken off to storage for no one knew how long.

One whole chapter of our life had ended. Or was it more than that? Was this a completely new departure? It felt like it. Cut adrift, floating in space, anchored only to and by our children and grandchildren. We were motherless and fatherless, but this had been true for several decades. But this time we were homeless – camped out in a guesthouse, delightful as it was, not knowing for how long, or where we would live when this tenancy concluded.

We had done this before, long, long ago, young and newly married. Memories of that first year of marriage arose, unsummoned. Now we were doing a new thing that felt like being dropped into an abyss, alone and unsupported.

The point is that we all walk near that abyss all the days of our life, and we choose to look the other way. We walk with eyes averted, pretend there is no end, hope against hope that everything we know will go on and on and on. Then it happens. We get hit in the face. Mother dies without warning. Father disappears. Divorce, sickness, death, separation – and we come face to face with the reality that sooner or later marks every human life. Then we know. We know.

No wonder most people choose, if they can, to remain in one spot and keep the inevitable at bay, trying not to think about the next step, the one that could lead to nothingness.

New life is assured. It is an essential part of God's promise in Christ. But if we are to know it in its fullness, we need to step forward, move out to greet it. It will not be easy. In fact, as we have discovered, it may be very difficult, marked by days of doubt, dis-ease and disturbance. Each, however, is preferable to death.

Death there will be. Be assured. Meanwhile, choose life.



Ted Gleason served as Editor and Director of Forward Movement Publications from 1995 to 2005. He was formerly Director of Development and a member of the faculty of Virginia Theological Seminary, headmaster of Noble and Greenough School (MA) and school minister of The Phillips Exeter Academy (NH). He has served as rector and curate. He writes, cooks and spends as much time as possible with Anne, his wife of fifty years. They have three grown daughters and six grandchildren and live in Washington, DC.