

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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They Will Catch Us and Set Us Free

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Retirement for me has been somewhat different from what I usually read about from other retired clergy. When I retired on November 1, 2002, I had been rector of Christ Church, Pensacola, Florida, for thirty-six years. I prepared the congregation for three years and told them the time had come for new, young leadership and many changes. "We have grown old together; now the time has come to grow young again." And so I retired the same day the new rector took over. We had a Change of Command Ceremony much like the Navy and so it was familiar in that Navy town and parish. I turned the parish over to the new rector, prayed for him and his family, and had the laying on of hands at the offertory. Then I removed my vestments at the chancel in full view of the congregation, put on my suit coat, and went to the pew to sit with my wife and family. The new rector then took over and celebrated the Holy Eucharist as the sixteenth rector of Christ Church.

Suddenly, after forty-four years, I was unemployed! We then did as so many newly retired people do; we went on a trip. Not a long trip, but a trip to Pawley's Island, S.C., my wife Eleanor's home, where we share the old home place with her six brothers and sisters. We love the old house, built by her father when Eleanor was a child. We have spent every vacation at Pawley's since we were married in Charleston, S.C. in 1962, when I was rector of the Church of St. Luke and St. Paul. A year later, we had our first son, and the church became the Cathedral Church of the Diocese of South Carolina. A lot happened that first year of our married life. South Carolina is a second home for us and we enjoy the freedom now of getting back "home" whenever we decide we want to go.

We spent our sabbatical in the old house at Pawley's shortly before retirement, getting used to what retirement would be like and allowing the parish to begin to know that I would not be their rector much longer. I worked on my most recent book, still in manuscript stage, *Does God Still Speak to Us*, a kind of spiritual journey of my own experiences seeing God making himself known to us. I brought the book to manuscript shape during the first months of retirement. I had written seven previous books. Writing is a good hobby. You can do it anywhere. All you need is a computer or a notebook, and away you go!

But most of the time we are in Pensacola, our home for so many years. Two of our three sons and their families live in Pensacola. My wife and I go to church with our sons and their families every Sunday we are in town. The new rector, Russell Levenson, is one of my best friends and

my priest. It is wonderful to be in the pew with my wife and family and to be a part of a growing and changing and alive parish. I do not do any supply work. I do not want to be an interim. The rector occasionally asks me to preach and celebrate but I have done that only a couple of times. I need to be in the pew, not in the spotlight. I have already been there and done that. Retirement is retirement: reading, writing, and doing nothing!

There is one thing I have found to be especially fun. I email friends all over the world, keeping in touch with many of them almost daily. Some I had neither seen nor communicated with in years. Now I have the time to do that. I have discovered a wonderful relationship with one of my former bishops who is totally deaf and does not enjoy talking, but loves keeping in touch by emailing about everything. We are both old liberal Democrats! We can complain as much as we please and no one threatens to withhold his or her pledge!

Another friend I have found, and whom I had not seen since seminary days at Union Seminary forty-six years ago is Lawton Posey, a retired Presbyterian minister in West Virginia. It was so good to rediscover a friendship at this point in our lives. He recently sent me a prayer he had written for his own Board of Pensions which I have somewhat adapted for our own Episcopal Church Pension Fund. I think it ought to be prayed at the next board meeting of the Pension Fund. God would chuckle and Thomas Cranmer might laugh heartily.

“Almighty God who hath so graciously given unto men the ability to make interest on divers monies, we beseech Thee to cause the investments of the Church Pension Fund to increase mightily, as Thou didst increase the Bread in the presence of a multitude, leaving much to be distributed amongst the poor so that we may praise Thee, the origin of Compound Interest and a Rising Stock Market. Through . . . etc.”

Good prayer. Direct, too. Prayers ought to be fun, sometimes. We are indeed blessed in the Episcopal Church with a very good pension fund. And it is fun and good to be retired . . . really retired, learning how to let go — and that is not easy. It is healing to be able to turn things over to the younger generation and to support them as they grow and mature. One of my friends was having a hard time retiring and I had a dream about him. The first time I thought it was about me, but the second time I knew better. I shared the dream with him and I think it helped. He was holding on to a window ledge high above a crowd of people. The building was on fire. The crowd below — all his friends — was yelling for him to let go. “Let go. We will catch you.” How true that is. Let go and God and our friends will catch us and set us free.



In retirement, the author serves on the Board of Trustees of West Florida Historic Preservation, a division of the University of West Florida, spends time with his three granddaughters, visits friends, and continues to write and speak on various occasions concerning theology and the history of the Pensacola area, first settled in 1559.