

# The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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## How Much Is Our Profession Our Protection?

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In the August edition of the *The Vintage Voice*, Frank Knebel suggested that retirement is a season we can use to discover who we are apart from our profession, the priesthood. I will continue that conversation by noting some of the attributes of the traditional professional life that may box us in. I use the plural pronouns such as 'us' and 'we,' even though only my husband is ordained, because with or without intent, I have experienced a shared ministry.

Retirement happens in segments of time. You preach your last sermon and receive the honors, accolades, and well wishes from congregation, friends, and family. The moving van comes, is packed, and goes. You turn in your keys. Retirement also happens as a transition over time. We are a second year into that transition and we are noticing, by its absence, the protection of professionalism.

Kit and I are 'plan ahead' people. In 1986, when we could barely afford to do so, we bought several acres of land in Maine, on an island where, since the late sixties, Kit has served a summer chapel. In 1995, I received a driveway into that land as my Christmas present. In 1996, we began to build the house. In 2001, after Easter, we moved in permanently. We are very fortunate. With a little money Kit's mother left us and with my salary after our three children were educated, we could afford to build a retirement home in a community of our choice.

With the exception of the first rectory we occupied (remember the song, "Little Boxes?") the others have been gracious, spacious living spaces, the responsibility of the junior warden and the parish. Now our home is our responsibility. Fortunately, in following his Leader, Kit has acquired good carpentry skills, but so often in the past, we were protected by the parish providing our shelter and other amenities of life such as health care and insurance.

In our new home, space has become an issue. Previously, our two professional lives rarely occupied the same space. Kit had a desk in his office; I had a desk in mine. We each had our home workspaces. Now we share workspaces. He is very competent in the kitchen and so am I, but instead of one cooking when the other is late or away, we now both prepare the meal in the same space. Pen and paperwork occupy the desk in the living room. Computer work takes place in the den. Kit accumulates piles of paper that he will eventually file. I like to work in a space

unencumbered by piles of paper. Our relationship is no longer made fonder by absence but is challenged to grow in proximity.

Time, in the professional world, always seemed in short supply. Multi-tasking became a way of life. Therefore, those who truly loved us were careful about asking for our time. A commitment we really did not want could be declined with the readily accepted explanation that we already had too much on our plates. Now, where we spend our time is our own choice, starkly made, for all to see. We are no longer protected by our professional commitments.

Living our faith is now a choice, not prescribed by set services, study groups, counseling sessions, and hospital visits. As ‘supply’ or ‘on call’ clergy, some of those scheduled activities continue for Kit, but how we feed and water our faith is much more our own choice. We do have time for Bible study, meditation, and prayer. We can choose which book we pick up to read, what part of the day to set aside for quiet time. We can no longer depend on the encounters with God through others that happen many times a day in the professional life of a full-time parish minister.

Appreciation here in the woods comes to us from each other, from our dachshund, Mitzy, from friends and family when they visit, and from the flowers that bloom back our hard work. But the stream of love is not as constant as from a well-pastored congregation and community. Kit’s profession certainly earned us some lumps and thumps on the head and elsewhere, but the daily exercise of his professional ministry — being present at the most emotional points of peoples’ lives — provided both of us with many expressions of gratitude and love. Now those expressions are a bit less frequent and less intense.

One path in retirement is to continue to seek the protection of the profession in those ways still possible: stay busy, supply, consult. Another path is to step outside the protective boundaries, breathe deeply, study the world around you, be open to what comes, stretch, and allow yourself to feel the sometimes scary freedom of being you.



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