



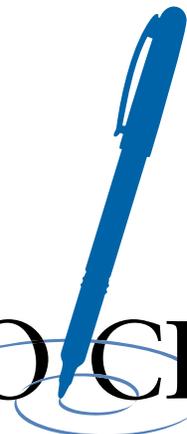
About the Author

The Reverend Mary Anne Dorner is an Episcopal priest in the Diocese of Southwest Florida. She has served churches in the Dioceses of Delaware, Pennsylvania and Southwest Florida. After retiring from parish ministry in 2006, she taught theology and church history for Barry University and served as a volunteer chaplain at Florida Hospital Wesley Chapel. Mary Anne and her husband Ted have been married for 53 years. They have four children and eight grandchildren. Besides visiting family who live up and down the Eastern Seaboard, they enjoy traveling around the world to experience different cultures and traditions.

About Vintage Voice

Vintage Voice is a monthly publication written by beneficiaries of The Church Pension Fund. We hope you enjoy these articles and find them helpful. Articles are published with the authors' permission. If you have a reflection about your life in retirement, consider writing for the Vintage Voice! Send your submissions to vintagevoice@cpg.org.

VINTAGE VOICE



Returning to the Passions of Our Youth

By The Rev. Mary Anne Dorner

I will never forget the thrill of opening the Sunday newspaper and seeing my name in print in the *Chicago Tribune*. It was March 24, 1963. Earlier that month, at the suggestion of my English teacher, I had submitted a guest column for their Voice of Youth section called: "What is Chicago?" Within days of publication, I received a personal letter from Mayor Richard J. Daley. He said: "I would like to commend and congratulate you on writing such a fine tribute to your city." I also received an invitation to attend a luncheon at McCormick Place for all those who were published in the *Tribune's* Voice of Youth columns during that school year. Those were heady days!

Needless to say, my parents were extremely proud of my work. My dad rushed out to buy extra copies of the "Sunday Trib" so he could pass them around to family and friends. My English teacher, who was also the moderator of our high school newspaper, was not only pleased but also happy for the publicity it gained for St. Michael's Central High School for Girls.

Throughout the years that followed, I wrote for my high school and college newspapers and even served on their editorial staffs. I often wrote for and edited newsletters for parishes and various volunteer organizations. As a parish priest, I wrote volumes of sermons and newsletter articles too numerous to count.

Fast forward to July 2017. I decided to return to "Beyond Walls" at Kenyon College, which is an annual interfaith writing intensive course designed to help clergy, seminarians, spiritual directors and other persons of faith to write for print and social media beyond the walls of their institutions.

During my first week at "Beyond Walls" in 2015, I focused primarily on writing for social media, and as a result I started my first blog: www.everydayblessingsplus.wordpress.com. This was really a stretch for me, but I have enjoyed getting my feet wet.

This summer, my focus was quite different. I was determined to find my "faith-based political and social voice." As I struggled with this goal, the faculty, staff and participants provided a rich teaching and learning environment along with lots of encouragement and support and helpful advice.

Several people at “Beyond Walls” asked me why I was finding it difficult to speak as a person of faith about social and political issues. First, I had to accept that for all my years of ordained ministry, I had tried to keep faith and politics separate. When I was ordained a deacon in 1989 and priest in 1991, the Church was still “adjusting” to women clergy. My goal was to be a faithful pastor, priest and teacher. In every parish I served, I was the first woman on staff, so I felt a special obligation to do well and be accepted.

On occasion, I did speak out on social issues but tried to heed the advice given to me by one of my seminary professors, Verna Dozier: “Preach the gospel but don’t tell people what to think or how to feel. Give them the freedom to come to their own conclusions.” I was blessed to serve congregations full of faithful people from various walks of life and a diversity of political positions. Dr. Dozier’s advice served me well throughout my ministry, especially in conservative parishes and dioceses.

At “Beyond Walls,” I discerned that the origin of my writer’s block was that I was still clinging to my old habit of trying to remain “apolitical.” It was time to let that go if I truly wanted to speak from my heart and make my voice heard.

By the time I left the conference, I had set several writing goals including submitting and having an OpEd column published in the *Tampa Bay Times*, my regional newspaper with a daily circulation of 240,000.

In less than two weeks, on July 26, 2017, my first major OpEd was printed across a five-column spread. The headline read: “Go and Do Likewise.” The lead was: “The biblical story of the Good Samaritan provides a litmus test for measuring our response to health care legislation.” It ran before the Senate’s last-ditch efforts to act on health care legislation before their August recess. Just in case you want that link, here it is!
www.tampabay.com/opinion/columns/column-the-good-samaritan-and-the-health-care-debate/2331462

I was just as thrilled to see my name in print as I was back in 1963. This time it was under my married name with my formal title: The Rev. Mary Anne Dorner, an Episcopal priest serving in the Diocese of Southwest Florida.

Soon I was receiving congratulations from family and friends around the country, some of whom read my column in our local newspaper and many of whom read my OpEd online. It was being widely shared on social media, and I have no idea how many people read it or passed it along.

The most exciting thing for me was returning to the passion of my youth. Writing the column and seeing my name in print, and knowing that it would be read by countless numbers of people from many backgrounds and a diversity of political opinions was quite a thrill.

I don’t know what your passion was when you were young. Perhaps you wanted to be a teacher or a race car driver, a gardener or a seamstress, or maybe even an Olympic athlete or movie actor or actress. Now is the time to ask yourself: “What do I want to do for the rest of my life?”

I encourage you to teach that class, drive that sports car, care for your garden, find joy in taking needle to thread, and/or try out for a spot in the Senior Olympics or local theater group. Rekindle the passions of your youth... and then dive right in and make a splash!



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