



About the Author

The Rev. Canon David M. Baumann was ordained in the Diocese of Los Angeles, and in the mid-1970s served as Curate at St. Clement's Church in San Clemente and at St. Anselm's Church in Garden Grove. For 34 years he was Rector of Blessed Sacrament Church in Placentia. He retired in 2012, and in 2014 became part-time Priest-in-Charge of St. Thomas' Church in Salem and St. John's Church in Centralia, both in the Diocese of Springfield, Illinois, where he now serves. He is a master instructor in martial arts and ran a popular and successful Christian martial arts program for 15 years before retirement. He is also the author of about fifteen books and well over a hundred magazine articles and online devotions.

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



The Golden Thread

By The Rev. Canon David M. Baumann

In the early 1960s when I was a young teenager, I became friends with a boy who lived a couple of doors down from me. We enjoyed many adventures in the fields and neighborhoods near our homes. In 1966, the year I graduated from high school, his family moved away. We determined to continue our friendship by writing letters.

Fifty-two years later, we continue to write. Our correspondence has amassed more than 1,300 pages and tells the stories of how I became a priest and he became a screenwriter for movies and television; of our marriages, and of our philosophies of life. We wrote the accounts of the deaths of parents and friends, of our moves, and of the many tragedies and joys of our lives. Both of us became published authors, and both of us were artistic and enjoyed illustrating our letters in pencil, pen and ink, and watercolor.

Letters produced on typewriters and now half a century old are fading, and the ink is slowly seeping into paper that is ever more drying out and becoming yellow and brittle. So now I spend two to three hours a day scanning the letters into my computer, improving the contrast, and editing them for general reading. Eventually they will become available in a 600-page volume through the print-on-demand industry.

Recently as I was scanning, I read something I had written more than 45 years ago when I was in seminary. Describing to my friend, who is not a Christian, the deep joy of knowing Jesus and how he was working in my life, I wrote, "This is a true continual natural high. I am a prisoner and a slave, but I am freer than I ever imagined, and it is forever." I was in my early 20s then—idealistic and sensitive and definitely inexperienced, but the joy to me radiates off the pages I wrote so long ago.

Now I am approaching 70 and my career is mostly history. As I look back, I have lots of memories: being ordained with a noted television/movie actor who became a good friend; an emergency baptism of a newborn triplet who would not survive, leaving her sisters to be raised as twins; ministering to a newly converted young woman who had been raised by parents who were Satanists; becoming friends with the author Kathryn Lindskoog, a friend and correspondent of C.S. Lewis, who was confirmed in her house since she was paralyzed with M.S.; being the instrument that converted a topless dancer, who remains dedicated to Christ to this day;

preaching at the funeral of a young murder victim in the presence of her murderer, who would not be arrested for about 15 years when technology caught up to the evidence; baptizing an old man on his deathbed; ministering seven years to a woman who had been described by the police as “one of the most savagely abused children in California history” so that she could become functional in society; walking down California coastal highway 1 with a priest-friend in formal clergy suits, tennis shoes, and Navy pea-coats while cars drove by honking greetings to us; performing a wedding for a “punker” couple with everyone in the congregation festooned with spikes, tattoos, and dyed hair and the bride seven-months pregnant; the amazing infusion of hundreds of college students into the Anglo-Catholic church of which I was Rector; and working with a forensic psychologist to track down the actual murderer of a woman whose husband, a member of my church, had been arrested for the murder—and who remains in prison 26 years later. These are just a few the memories that come to the surface without much effort.

I have performed about 150 weddings and the same number of funerals, baptized at least 500 people, and heard around 800 confessions. I figure that I have said Mass about 6,000 times and preached at least that many sermons. Like all priests and ministers of the Gospel, I have my share of failures and successes, of sins of which I am greatly ashamed and saintly acts for which I am grateful to our God who guides and empowers—and in everything I see his always-reliable grace and mercy and beauty.

The immaturity so evident in the early letters to my friend is long gone. The world has changed and I have changed, and through the changes both the joys and sufferings of my ministry have been intense. Over the years I have been undeservedly loved by many people, and suffered grievously and equally undeservedly from the anger of a dozen or two others who projected on me fiery rage over hurt done to them by others. I have mental and emotional scars, and carry wounds that cannot ever heal in this life. I have learned what St. Paul meant when he wrote, “Let no one trouble me, for I bear on my body the marks of Jesus.” The marks are both evidence of deep suffering and tokens of the glory that ultimately triumphs.

From those heady days of seminary when I wrote naively to my friend of the all-encompassing joy of knowing Jesus, I can draw an unbroken line to my life today, and note surely that through the years there has always been the golden thread of that same all-encompassing joy that no one can take away. The priesthood is at the core of my calling and therefore of my identity forever. Praise be to Jesus Christ!



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