



About the Author

The Rev. Jonathan B. Coffey retired two years ago after 38 years in ordained ministry. He served congregations in Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, New York, and Michigan, and focused primarily on healing and reconciliation during active ministry.

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@cpf.org.

VINTAGE VOICE



Retirement Is an Adventure

By The Rev. Jonathan B. Coffey

I retired almost two years ago on my 65th birthday. Before that day came, I took a sabbatical that was unlike any other study or sabbatical leave I had ever taken. I went to Trinidad and Tobago in the Eastern Caribbean with a birding group. I had hunted birds when younger, but I had done very little bird watching. That was precisely the point. I sensed that whatever retirement was or was not, it was for me an adventure in and through which I might intentionally take on experiences I have never had, and, likewise, forsake those experiences I have had for the full 38 years I had functioned as a parish priest.

So, I was an apprentice, a neophyte, and I needed to ask for help (regularly) and put myself in situations where I might be doing something that made me quite uncomfortable. I learned a great deal about observation, the instinct Adam had to name the creatures in the Garden, and the highly complex nature of habitats. It was a wonderful experience and I will both remember it fondly and draw from it often.

At the end of the bird watching marathon of about three weeks that included staying in the birdwatcher Vatican called the Asa Wright Nature Center, I went on a retreat with the Benedictines in northern Trinidad. This was more familiar ground. I am, instinctively and as a result of formation, a Christian of Benedictine character. I have made retreats in all manner of places and times with Benedictines over the 38 years of active ministry. So, I was surprised when this turned out to be a particularly unexpected moment of grace. During my time of prayer, study, and reflection, I heard the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ say to me in the power of the Holy Spirit: "Jonathan, you have done parish ministry for quite some time and you have done it well. Now, moving forward into retirement, I want you to do what you have not done, and do not do what you always have done."

So, I lay fallow for a year after retiring, doing no ecclesial work whatsoever, sort of a detox period. During that year of sitting in the pew with my wife (which I came to love), I took up rowing (in boats of eight with a cox) and yoga. I have done a lot of sports

over the years, but I had never rowed as part of a team. This is the ultimate team sport in that you can literally bring your whole group into the water (which I have come close to accomplishing) and you can undermine their efforts and sow all manner of poor boatmanship through either your own mistakes or, worse, lack of focus or laziness. But, conversely, when you and the other seven get in sync, it is a spiritual experience, a time of profound loveliness.

Likewise, I had never experienced yoga. I had hosted countless yoga groups at churches I have served over the years, but I had never myself participated. I recently had a knee replacement and probably will be getting another in the next year or two, so I am somewhat disabled in terms of getting into many of the yogic positions. I have taken much solace in reading Matthew Sanford's book, *Waking: A Memoir of Trauma and Transcendence*. Matt teaches yoga at his Mind/Body/Solutions Center in Minneapolis from his wheel chair. Matt is a paraplegic due to a tragic auto accident when he was 13. Matt believes that "adaptive yoga" is for everyone, because everyone is disabled, while some actually know it and adjust accordingly. I knew from the very first yoga position that I assumed, that I would be doing yoga for the rest of my life. Yoga for me is prayer in motion, embodied prayer.

So, I say that retirement is an adventure. My neurology friends tell me new neuronal networks open up in our brain(s) when we learn to do something we have never done before, and that networks can and will shut down when we walk only on trails of familiarity and habit. I give thanks both publicly and privately for The Church Pension Fund, The Episcopal Church Medical Trust, and for the abiding witness of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (Social Security) and Lyndon Baines Johnson (Medicare) in my life and in the lives of our people. Life is a privilege, and the privilege seems to deepen and widen when we take the road not (yet) taken.



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