



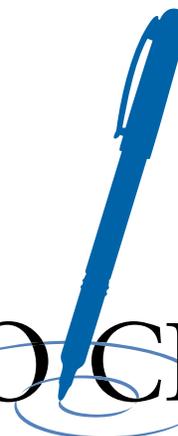
About the Author

The Reverend Canon Paul David Lawson has served in a wide variety of ministries. He has worked in the mission field in Panama and Saudi Arabia; served St. Thomas of Canterbury in Albuquerque; participated in the founding of St. Martin's Shelter for the Homeless; worked for the Bishop of the Diocese of Los Angeles; and served St. Cross Episcopal Church in Hermosa Beach from where he retired. He spent almost 30 years as a Coordinator of the General Convention. He is the author of *Old Wine in New Skins* as well as various articles on Centering Prayer and Systems Theory. Currently, he works as a track official at college and USA Track and Field (USATF) meets. He has been married to Cristina Wyss Collins de Lawson since they were both too young.

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



Racing Through Retirement

By The Rev. Canon Paul David Lawson

When I retired, I didn't have a real plan for the next part of my life. I knew that I didn't want to keep doing what I had been doing. I wanted to do something different. But that is easier said than done. I had only been retired a few months when I was asked by the bishop to take a long-term interim. That was followed by a bout of cancer and then followed by one more long-term interim. While the cancer was something "different," it was not exactly what I had in mind.

When another church post came up, I felt that I really didn't want to do it, but, at the same time, I felt a sense of obligation to continue ministry. Wrestling with that conflict, I talked with a clergy friend, who said, "Paul, remember you are retired." And for the first time it really sunk in: I was retired. Having put 30+ years into the Lord's work, I prayed about it, and the answer I received was to do something else.

My first attempt at doing something new was to go to work at the zoo wrangling goats and sheep. While not an actual ministry, it was kind of biblical. The job mostly consisted of following the animals around the petting zoo and sweeping up after them. It reminded me of the joke about a person working in a carnival sweeping up after the elephants. His sister said, "How can you stand the smell?" And she offered him a job in an office, with a desk, better clothes, and a good salary. He turned it down saying, "What and give up show business?" After a couple of years, I gave up show business and my wife and I moved to Pilgrim Place in Claremont, CA, a retirement community. But once again, I was without a plan for retirement.

The community I moved to offered plenty of opportunities to work in the church, work in areas of social justice, write articles, give lectures, and put on conferences, but that sounded all too much like what I had done for the past 30 years.

Now, we come to the part of the story about unfulfilled dreams. Could I do something different? I had always been busy in college, graduate school or seminary, and after that, in the ministry of the church. There had not been a lot of time for concentrated play. A day here, a day there, but no long stretches. When my son was growing up and I took an administrative job in the church, he said, "This is great daddy, you can be home for Christmas."

Although I had mostly stayed away from athletics, many members of my family had been very active. My mother had beaten me on the tennis courts when she was in her sixties, and wearing heels. I thought now is my chance to have an athletic career.

As odd as it might sound, the retirement community had a track team that competed internationally. I was driving my wife crazy being around the house, so she said, “Why don’t you take up race walking.” And so began my long, slow slide into being a jock like the many members of my family—a fate I had tried to avoid.

I was never a morning person, but I went out to the track at the crack of dawn. The only two D’s I received in college were 8 o’clock classes. It took me all of those two classes to figure out never to do that again. Anyway, I went to the track and began learning how to race walk. No, it’s not power walking, or fast walking, it’s race walking, which is an Olympic sport. You know, the guys with the funny hips?

Every morning, I got up and went around the track. I started with a quarter of a mile and went up from there. I went round and round the track every morning, except Sunday. The team never met on Sunday. In my first race, a 3-mile road race, I was beaten by an 80-year-old. Athletics is good for keeping you humble, and as it turns out, running or walking is good for a lot of other things, too.

Now I compete regularly both on the road and on the track. I get to meet all different kinds of people from all different walks of life and political views. The common denominator is sport. It gives you a place to start talking with younger people and older people; people different from you, and people outside your normal comfort zone. That could be the best part of all.

Of course, it is also great for you physically. Recent studies have come out saying if you are going to do just one exercise for your health, then walking is the best one. It is also good for your mental health. When you are on the track or the road early in the morning, you have time to process what’s going on in your life—the good and the bad. It turns out that there are lots of downers in the Golden Years that people forgot to mention. A good shot of endorphins in the early AM is a great way to start the day.

Let me finish with a word about excess. I took to race walking like a duck to water. After my first quarter mile, I thought I was going to die. Now, instead, I am going to be doing my sixth marathon this year. I have competed with the USA Masters Track Team in France, Australia, and this fall I’ll be going to Spain to compete in the 10K and 20K for the United States. Race walking has given me a chance to meet people from around the world and to strive together towards a common goal of fellowship and community. It has turned out to be a great retirement.

