

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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Downsizing/Upsizing

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To move, as we recently did, from a 2,700-square-foot home into a 1,400-square-foot apartment at Westminster Canterbury (a “continuing care” community here in Richmond, VA), we had to downsize — big time! As a long-time collecting addict (*never throw it away; you never know when it might come in handy*) I had some major hoarding issues. What about the 100+ “Do Not Disturb” signs I had acquired from hotels around the world? And butterflies (my favorite of all Resurrection symbols) — a few real ones mounted, plus 200 other butterfly facsimiles in various shapes, sizes, and materials. And then there were the crèches — over fifty of them from places I have traveled — what to do with them? Yet all these “collectibles” were a minor space consideration compared to our bulkier furniture and clothes and books and no telling what all else.

The experienced “transition” lady who guided us in the move told my wife: “You’ll only want to take one-third of what you’ve got in the kitchen.” Pictures: “You will lose half the wall and table space for them.” And books: “What are you going to do with all those books?” Saving only those I really treasured (and could not get from one of the three seminary libraries nearby), I gave the remaining theological books to the local Presbyterian seminary library, which has connections with ninety-nine other seminaries around the world. Our other downsized books went to the “Friends of the Library” — the fundraising organization of that local library. Fortunately, most of the furniture, much of which we inherited from our parents, found homes with our three children. Three partial truckloads: to California and Arizona and North Carolina. How wonderful it is to visit them and see those quality pieces in good use! And then there were organizations such as Goodwill and Habitat for Humanity — willing and worthy recipients of much of what remained.

You get the picture. But there has been more to this downsizing than just moving into smaller quarters. As I went through the physical move, I also became aware of another downsizing that was going on in my life.

I used to be one of the “go to” people in my area — the result of having been the rector of medium-sized congregations, having directed the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy (which advocates for social justice before the state and federal governments), having led various diocesan and local and statewide committees and organizations over the years. For example, social justice and liturgy have been two of my passions. In the state’s General Assembly, I was known not only as “that priest in the plaid pants” but as a credible advocate for “the least of Christ’s brothers and sisters.” During the transition days into the 1979 Prayer Book, I was chair of the diocesan Liturgical Commission, and my parish served as a model for implementation of the new language and liturgies.

That was then. Now is now. While I do continue to be an active contributing board member for two non-profit social justice advocacy organizations, on the church and community levels, a new generation has taken over with its own “go to” people. I have had to step back. I have had to downsize *myself*— or at least my professional ego.

I am aware, though, that important parts of my life have not been downsized. The Lord has opened to me several doors of life-giving relationships and experiences. I’ve gotten to see my California granddaughters play Lacrosse, my sport of choice. I’ve gained more quality time with my wife of fifty-four years. I’ve even tackled some of those “projects on hold,” like converting slides into computer images and discovering some of my long-lost ancestors. Having “downsized” from the day-to-day responsibilities of a rector, I have been better able to “bloom where I am planted,” which in turn has enabled me to pursue another passion: reclaiming the ministry of all the Baptized in their daily lives, both locally and nationally.

Amidst all this, I keep reminding myself of Jesus’ Easter call to his disciples to meet, not in Jerusalem or Jericho or Bethany, but in Galilee, the home base for most of them. My physical Galilee has changed; so has my professional Galilee. But, as with the disciples, the Risen Lord is present in my most important Galilee — the spiritual Galilee where I have found life-giving stability and strength over the years. Christ is present to guide me through the physical and emotional changes in my new environment. Downsizing furniture and books and butterflies and coasters — that’s been accomplished. Downsizing my ego—that’s a work-in-progress. But with the Risen Lord as my ever-present “transition” guide, all this downsizing begins to feel like something else, something lighter and larger — an “upsizing.”



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The continuing-care community mentioned in this article is one of many such facilities affiliated with the Episcopal Church. To find those in your area, go to www.cpg.org/financialplanning and then click on [Retiree Housing Locator](#).