

The Vintage Voice

Serving The Church Pension Fund's Family of Beneficiaries

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Returning to College

The Rev. Bruce Jacobson

I have had a long and varied association with a unique Christian college. Gordon College is the only multid denominational college in New England. Its striking campus is located on the North Shore of Boston, in the vicinity of Beverly Farms, Hamilton, and Wenham, Massachusetts. Gordon's goal is to promote a strong liberal arts program undergirded by the spirit of academic freedom. Its academic and athletic programs are grounded in a life of faith that seeks to nurture the whole person as she/he prepares for a life in the larger world.

My introduction to Gordon occurred many years ago when I served as interim rector of St. John's Episcopal Church in nearby Beverly Farms. I needed a place to swim, and through a member of St. John's, a trustee of the college, I was given a guest membership that enabled me to use the Bennett Center's excellent athletic facilities. A heart attack (followed by a stent and cardiotherapy) moved me beyond the pool. I began to use the padded indoor running track and then the Fitness Center.

One day, the director of the Physical and Wellness Center, the son of one of our bishops, approached me and offered to take me on as a project in advanced age training. Little did I know that he would lead me to new territories as exemplified by a week at the Craftsbury Rowing Camp in Vermont when I was seventy years of age. I had decided — after rowing one million meters on the “erg” (short for ergometer, an indoor rowing machine) — that I would like to learn to scull. For a week, the clock was turned back, and I was surrounded by Olympic gold medal coaches and advanced rowers who were not of the age of you or me. But that is the seed for another *Vintage Voice* article.

I used to use the Fitness Center early in the morning. One day, when I was asked to leave at 8AM, I learned that a college course entitled Strength Training 089 was about to convene. Imagine my surprise six or seven years ago when the head of the department, who taught the course, asked if I would assume the instructorship of the class. My prayerful internal response was, “Who me, Lord?” I thought of all the reasons why I shouldn't undertake the course. Her words were, “You will do fine.” I didn't believe her. A priest, I was; a physical education instructor, I was not. I shall always remember my first class. The trepidation was worse than

my first sermon! Lo and behold, I lived through it. Gordon College had led me to yet another new territory.

There are few days, as I enter the Bennett Center, that a particular thought does not enter my mind: “Before the doors are locked on this day I will probably be the oldest person who will journey through these halls. Why would any person who has attained the age of seventy-six spend so much time in this building?” The answer, I decided, might require some disciplined thought on my part. Maybe I should even write my thinking down. Eventually this exercise turned into an article for the college paper, *The Tartan*. The preparation for that article revealed to me my growing involvement with and affection for an institution that occupies much of my waking hours. With one article accomplished, my mind was drawn to the *Vintage Voice*, which I must admit always whets my interest. Might the story of my growing love and involvement be of interest to others who are advancing in age and, because of the Church Pension Fund, are given the privilege to search for vision and purpose in new and challenging ways?

I discovered (somewhat to my surprise) while writing these two articles that what started out as a place to swim has become the focal point of my life and even my ministry. Gordon College has become the community of faith where I practice my priesthood — only in new and different ways. It might happen when I am exercising with the students and, as an act of devotion, we hold our push-ups long enough to recite together the prayer our Lord taught us. It might happen during an outdoor track session, when we lie on the AstroTurf and in silence look deep into the time/space continuum that stretches into God’s Eternity. It might be in a quiet visit with a student or fellow staff member who is experiencing a difficult moment in his or her personal life. I revel in the relationships that vibrant college students bring to the “old man.” The pastoral relationships offer me joy and hope, while the wisdom that I have discerned from fifty-two years of priesthood is shared with the people of the Gordon community.

I have discovered that retirement provides each of us an opportunity to take a new step for this life, and concurrently to prepare for the life eternal that you and I have proclaimed during our ministry in the Body of Christ.



Bruce Jacobson and his wife, Gayle, currently are communicants of St. John’s Church, Beverly Farms, Massachusetts. They have three married children and seven grandchildren. During his active fifty-year ministry in the Episcopal Church, Bruce served the Dioceses of Chicago, Alaska, Western New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire.