



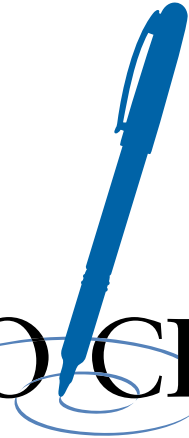
About the Author

After retirement from St. Luke's Church in Racine, WI (7/2006), Fr. Craig lay fallow for three months until he attended a CREDO conference. Afterward, he was convinced he had work yet to accomplish. Since that time, he has served Wisconsin parishes in Milwaukee, Portage, West Bend, Lake Geneva, and currently, Menomonee Falls. Otherwise, in retirement, the Rev. Craig spends time just being, and not doing, with his wife of 50+ years, Dr. Marie Pascoe Craig.

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



That Woman That You Gave Me

By The Rev. Richard Craig

My wife has been a blessing to me over the many years of my priesthood. She continues to be the person I need to help me navigate my final years on earth.

In the beginning....

“But the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’ He said, ‘I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.’ He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ The man said, ‘The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.’” Genesis 1:9-12a

What has my journey been with the woman that God gave me?

My wife, Marie Pascoe Craig, a mother, wife, counselor, and educator, has been my constant companion over the past 50+ years. She has helped me weather the storms that inevitably arise among those that serve God. She has been the one who has counseled me to maintain a simple toolbox, in which I have collected over the years all little notes of appreciation, thanks, and the like, that I have been given. The reason for maintaining such a box is for those times when one might question why he or she has accepted the call. A review of such notes just might be the ticket to understanding why he or she has chosen this path. I confess that I had to purchase a second toolbox; the first one reached its capacity.

When I was conducting what would be the last annual meeting of my active parish ministry before retiring, and the forces of opposition began to raise their collective heads, my lovely wife sent word to me, via one of our children, that “It is time to go.” Simultaneously, I had the same sentiment and my numbers for retirement looked good enough to make such a bold move.

Over the years, with the help of parishioners, I have published Lenten booklets for use by the broader congregation in the Lenten season. At times, when the volunteers were few in number, my wife stepped up and took on more. In smaller missions and parishes, she has taught Sunday school, served on the altar guild, the Daughters of the King, and in prayer shawl ministries.

She helped me to maintain my gentler side. I can hear her say, “Don’t beat up the people.” I have also heard her say, “Perhaps you were not supposed to have said that,” and “I love it when you preach from the aisle without written notes.”

Pride and stubbornness can be debilitating things. In several churches I have served, I have been able to conduct the Renewal Weekend, a weekend project developed by my mentor and his wife. In its original format, it is a 14½-hour long weekend retreat-like event, usually held the weekend of the bishop’s annual visit to confirm, preach, and celebrate.

At what turned out to be my last assignment in retirement, I tried in vain to conduct such a weekend, but people were not signing up. My initial attempt failed miserably. That woman reminded me that Fr. Phil had changed his conduct of the program, reducing the weekend to a single day. I resisted. To me, for the program to be effective, it needed to be in its original format.

Marie continued to work with me, and some months later, someone must have hit me over the head with a two by four. I heard the exhortations of my wife. She and I went to work paring the program down, making it fit into a single day from about 9:00AM till 5:00PM. We also renamed this new offering, “A Day of Spiritual Renewal”. With these changes, people signed up and participated. It was an absolute success, thanks in large part to my lovely and persistent wife.

Needless to say, not only in ministry has this woman been such a joy to me, but in our personal relationship as well. Did I mention that she and I were high school sweethearts? I used to walk her home every day after school. In this past year, she and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. I am thankful she has chosen to cleave to me all these years.

I can appreciate her resolve and her need to be with me continually regardless of where I may be. I can hear that other woman God gave me—my mother—who didn’t like my living so far away (I moved to San Antonio after having been born and raised in Atlanta). She said to my beloved (because Marie did not encourage me to return home), “I thought you had more sense than he has.”

Throughout the years, my wife and I have done that Jesus-John the Baptist thing, i.e., as I have increased, she has decreased, and vice versa.

My significant other has served to complete me as I have attempted to live the life that God would have me live. I hope all reading this will join me in offering thanks to God for the woman that he has given us in this mortal life.

There has been a lot of history between that first sin in the world, the woman’s complicity in that matter, down through the last day on earth of our Lord where another woman does a courageous thing—God provided a woman for his son’s last days.

At the Sixth Station, we learn that “Veronica wipes the face of Jesus.”