

Pittsburgh Silver Eagles: Chaplaincy to Retired Clergy and Families
Report to 2025 Diocesan Convention

Background:

The Pastoral Care Office of the Church Pension Fund invites the bishop of each diocese of the Episcopal Church to appoint a volunteer *Chaplain to the Retired* to be an ongoing liaison for communication between the Fund and Clergy Pension Fund Beneficiaries who were canonically resident in the diocese at the time of their retirement or who were canonically resident in another diocese at the time of their retirement but who are now physically resident within the geographical borders of the diocese.

The Chaplain may also serve to supplement parish and diocesan pastoral care for retired clergy; for their wives, husbands, and families; and for the surviving widows and widowers and other family of clergy who have died. My and our good friend Arthur Dilg was appointed to this role for Pittsburgh in 2002--following the exemplary ministries of Chaplain predecessors like John Leggett and Aus Hurd—and served a remarkable 19 years. With Bishop McConnell’s consent Art passed along the baton to me in February of 2021--and Bishop Solak generously renewed my appointment when she became our diocesan bishop later that year. While it was necessary this year for me to step down from this ministry when I left the diocese at the beginning of September, I told Bishop Solak that I am glad to be of whatever support I can be informally during a time of transition and as a newly-appointed Chaplain begins his or her service.

Report for 2025:

Our Pittsburgh “Silver Eagle flock” has a census that changes really month-by-month with the ebb and flow of life. New retirees are added, addresses change, and dear friends and colleagues are called Home. **A snapshot: as of September, 2025, I count on our Pittsburgh Pension Fund Roster 105 retired clergy, 85 wives and husbands of retired clergy, and 28 widows and widowers—so, a Silver Eagle total of 218.**

As Pittsburgh’s Retiree Chaplain I have participated in occasional Zoom conference calls with other Chaplains in Provinces I, II, and III and in webinars and other programs provided by the

Fund to offer information on the state of the Fund in general and particularly on issues related to retiree benefits. The Pension Fund also invites the Chaplains to an annual in-person regional gathering and to a once-every-three-years national gathering for education and support. It's an evolving program intended to equip Chaplains to be helpful to our retiree and surviving spouse community when questions and concerns related to Pension Fund benefits arise. Often the Chaplain will know the answers to the questions folks ask. And when that isn't the case, the Chaplain will always do his or her best to find someone "at Pension" who does!

It has also been my pleasure to be available to clergy who are beginning to plan for retirement. Over a cup of coffee or at lunch I share what I can about Pension Fund retiree benefits and lend a hand to help "aspiring" retirees negotiate the sometimes complicated administrative, vocational, and personal transition from *Active* to *Retired* status.

In addition to fielding questions and concerns about pension and medical benefits, I have sent between 20 and 40 birthday/anniversary/congratulations/get well/sympathy/and other cards and notes each month. I've also posted occasional pastoral news and prayer requests to a Silver Eagles e-mail distribution list. It has also been important for me to stay in touch with Bishops Solak and Cameron and Canons Kim Karashin and Bill Henry to assist them in their pastoral ministry with this segment of our clergy family—sometimes with an e-mail, Zoom chat, phone call, or home/hospital visit, sometimes over a cup of coffee or a lunch, etc. I've been delighted to continue to support Silver Eagle Carol Henley in the on-going First Friday of the Month "Zoom" fellowship group, *Pittsburgh Senior Clergy Connect*. This group is open to "senior" and retired clergy who are canonically resident in the Episcopal Diocese and especially to those who live near enough to be able to participate in occasional in-person gatherings.

When possible I have also attended funerals for retired Pittsburgh clergy colleagues. It is a special privilege to speak with the surviving spouses, children, and other family members and friends to express my and our prayerful thanksgiving and a word of Christian sympathy on behalf of colleagues and friends the wider church. Since our last Convention in November of 2024 I count 8 of our Pittsburgh Silver Eagles who have entered Greater Life, and we would remember them and give thanks for the gifts they shared with all of us over many decades:

Deborah Wood Appleyard, widow of Bob Appleyard, Jr. (who served at the Fox Chapel Episcopal Church)—and so as well the daughter-in-law of Robert B. Appleyard, V Bishop of Pittsburgh; **Ben Winsor**, who served in Pittsburgh as Priest in Charge of Grace, Mt. Washington and as Rector of Nativity, Crafton, before leaving church work to serve as an addictions counselor; **David Casto**, who served as Assistant Rector of Calvary, East Liberty, before moving to New Jersey and serving many decades as a Supply Priest and working professionally in leadership roles in Non-Profit marketing and development; **Ira Houck, Jr.**, who served a long tenure as Assisting Priest at Grace, Mt. Washington, and in many roles of diocesan leadership; **Ruth Manson**, who served as Parish Deacon at Christ Church, Greensburg, and as one of our diocesan Hospital Visitors; **Mary Strickland**, widow of Walter (who served as Rector of Christ Church, Brownsville, and in retirement as a Supply Priest); **Ronald Younkin**, a priest who was canonically resident in Pittsburgh but whose life and ministry were centered in Fayetteville, Arkansas; and **Joe Vitunic**, founding and long-serving Rector of the Church of the Savior, Ambridge.

We Silver Eagles also remembered in our prayers this year **Nancy Welfer**, who served many years here in Pittsburgh as Assistant Chancellor of the diocese and as Parliamentarian of Convention—in addition to many leadership roles at Trinity Cathedral; and **Barbara Wright**, mother of fellow Silver Eagle Mark Wright, who served many years as a teacher at St. Edmund's Academy and as Parish Administrator at the Church of the Ascension.

Again, I continue to be thankful for the opportunity I have had over the past five years to serve in this role. I will continue with prayers and much affection for all in the Pittsburgh Silver Eagle flock—and especially for the life and ministry of the next Chaplain!

Bruce Robison