

A Cabin in the Woods

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by the Rev. Christopher Chamberlin Moore

It is a dark night in October several years ago. I am with our dog, Molly, driving through an extensive tract of woods to a place I have never seen before and where I will spend the next seven months.

When I say I am driving through the woods, I am literally driving “through” the woods. There is no proper road. I am driving along a hiking trail, my only illumination the light of the moon above me and my headlights reflecting off the pine trees on either side. After many twists and turns and wondering whether Molly and I will end up in Rehoboth Bay, I get to my destination. There in front of me is a log cabin, back-lit by the moon and silhouetted on the edge of Rehoboth Bay.

The circumstances in which I find myself are the result of a conversation I had a couple of months previously with the Rev. Max Wolf, then rector of All Saints’ Church and St. George’s Chapel in Rehoboth. He has called me out of retirement to become a half-time assistant at the two churches.

I will be dividing my time between my new duties in Rehoboth and our home in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania, where I have recently retired as rector of the local Episcopal church. There is only one hitch. There is no clergy housing immediately available in Rehoboth.

Max offers a possible solution. The Episcopal Church in Delaware has a house at Camp Arrowhead, the diocesan camp in Lewes. The house, he explains, is a little rustic. In fact, it is very rustic. It is a log cabin, albeit heated and air-conditioned. The television (yes, there is one) receives only one channel. There are no neighbors next door. In fact, there *is* no next door. The cabin sits alone on 110 acres on a spit of land on the shore of Rehoboth Bay. Max asks me, somewhat tentatively: Do you think you could possibly make this work just for now?

I think I’ve died and gone to Heaven.

I've always been drawn to silence and solitude, qualities which are often at variance with the busy rhythms of daily parish ministry. In addition, I have just retired from more than 40 years of active parish ministry. I need time to figure out just what this thing called retirement is all about. I need time to be alone, to be *myself*, to discover just what this self is that I want to be alone with.

I need time to deprogram from 40 years of parish ministry.

Over the next few days, Molly and I settle into our new life in the cabin, and I settle into my new ministry at All Saints' and St. George's.

As the weeks pass, the days fall into an easy pattern. I read Morning Prayer at dawn with the first rays of the sun over Rehoboth Bay. Evenings at dusk, I walk Molly along the trails of Arrowhead. At three in the morning, when Molly's barking occasionally wakes me up, I come to realize that it is not an intruder outside the cabin. It is the deer and squirrels scampering around outside my bedroom window.

My first month in the cabin coincides with Halloween. I call my wife, Janice, back home in Pennsylvania the day after. She tells me she had more than 100 trick-or-treaters. I tell her I had 10 deer.

As the weeks pass, I come to realize that I am following a routine not unlike that of Jesus. Jesus had the most public of public ministries — preaching, teaching, healing, and traveling throughout Palestine. But he alternated these intensely public periods with time alone. Jesus frequently retreated to a "lonely place," where the disciples often had to seek him out.

The most balanced life, I come to think, is one which intentionally combines both solitude as well as community, and which seeks to combine the two in creative harmony.

During my seven months in the cabin, I often reflect that our society does not provide opportunities, such as I was experiencing, for people to renew and refresh themselves, or to adjust to radically changed circumstances in their lives. The fact is, we need to seek out such opportunities for ourselves. No one will do it for us.

Most likely these opportunities will not take the form of seven months in a cabin in the woods. But it may be a weekend at a convent or retreat center, or a week or two at the beach or in the mountains. And here's the thing — we need to give our spouse or partner permission to seek out such time for themselves if they feel the need to do so.

Finally, April arrives and the farmhouse at St. George's is ready for us to move in. Janice and I and Molly settle in, and a new phase of our life begins, one which involves rambles through St. George's historic cemetery and the woods behind the parish hall. But I never forget that cabin in the woods, or the dawn breaking over Rehoboth Bay.

The Rev. Chris Moore serves on the clergy staff of the Brandywine Collaborative Ministries in Wilmington. His latest book is Soul Stages: Surviving and Thriving in the Second Half of Life.
ccmsoulman@aol.com