

Retired pastors as members

By [Steve Woolley](#)

July 11, 2011

This

last Saturday and Sunday I celebrated at the parish from which I retired three and a half years ago. The rector was away at camp, and his normal sources of backup were otherwise engaged. I imagine it took some courage on his part to even ask me. To tell the truth, I was a little nervous about it too. Things are done differently now. The Saturday night service is a variation on a eucharistic prayer from the New Zealand Book of Common Prayer. Beautiful, but unfamiliar to me. Sunday always includes a children's sermon, something at which I am truly lousy.

It's

not like we've been totally absent. When we are in town and I'm not preaching elsewhere, that's where we worship, so we are still well connected, but as parishioners, not clergy. As it turned out, everything went well. It felt good to be leading worship in a familiar place among (mostly) familiar people. Selfishly, it also felt good to know that I did not have to open up, double check every arrangement, resolve a few last minute issues, and then hang around to turn out the lights and lock up. I could just relax and be the visiting clergy.

St.

Paul's is a bit unusual among congregations of almost any denominations in that it has two former rectors in the congregation, both me and my predecessor. It seems to work OK. I think that is because each of us is comfortable in our roles and supportive of one another as good friends. Most important, we retired rectors are very intentional about avoiding even the appearance of second guessing the current rector. To top it off, the congregation also includes two other retired priests from nearby communities. A rector who is not confident in his or her

abilities might have some difficulty with that. I wonder if any readers have had their own experiences with retired rectors/pastors remaining as members of the congregation?

Originally posted at [Country Parson](#).