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HEALTHY TRANSITIONS TASK FORCE

The 2003 Synod Assembly affirmed the decisions of the Deans that a task force should be formed to guide congregations and pastors in making healthy transitions in celebration of the ministry and mission that they shared together. This action was in response to a resolution reminding us that often congregations and pastors do not complete their good byes at the time of the pastor's departure, leaving succeeding relationships in jeopardy.

The Healthy Transitions Task Force began its work in November 2003. We learned a lot this year about ourselves, the congregations, the Synod, and the ministries we share together. Our mission was to help congregations, their pastoral leaders, and families find healthy ways to say Godspeed to one another with thanksgiving and joy for the ministry that they shared in a particular time and place.

There was a workshop at the 2004 Synod Assembly to present the packet of resulting resources that are available to the departing pastors, their families, congregations and arriving pastors. A copy of this packet will be sent to all pastors and congregational leaders when a departure is announced. In addition, mentor leaders will be available to work with congregations and pastors through the departure process.

On behalf of the members of the Healthy Transitions Task Force, we would like to thank you for holding us in prayer during the last year. We appreciated the sincerity with which you discussed the issues of "saying goodbye" for pastors and congregations at the 2004 Synod Assembly.

A special thank you to Bishop Marie Jerge for her prayerful support of our efforts. Her leadership in this process was invaluable. Thank you to all those who diligently and carefully participated in the conversations and choices that were made for resources that would be included in the Healthy Transitions Packet. They were:

The Rev. William Clasen
Bishop Marie C. Jerge
Mrs. Shirley Niebanck
Mr. Gary Roller
The Rev. Dr. John Scarafia, Recorder

The Rev. James A. Hulihan
Mrs. Shirley Miller
Mr. Carl Phelps
The Rev. F. Charles Schwartz

We ask that you pray for those who will ultimately use these resources and for the new life that will come through their good-byes. May these resources enrich our mission and ministry together.

The Rev. M. Elaine Berg, Convenor

Healthy Transitions Theological Introduction

As human beings we are naturally self-centered and focused on our own needs. We are estranged from God, from others and from ourselves in a condition known as sin. Because our God has chosen to enter into a relationship with us and seek our salvation, he sent his Son to provide access to that salvation. In the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ human beings are reunited with God and offered forgiveness of sin and eternal life. We are claimed by this gracious and merciful God through our Baptism and made members of the church, the body of Christ in the world.

This community of forgiven saints, known as the church, is the context within which Christians hear the gospel news of Christ's teaching and passion proclaimed and receive the sacraments of Baptism and Communion. In our Baptism we are called to share our faith and trust in God's loving care. For some of us, God's call to serve becomes more specific and we hear the call to Ordained Ministry.

After training and preparation a Pastor accepts a call from a congregation to use their particular skills, abilities and gifts in Christ's service. The ministry performed by a Pastor varies from situation to situation but involves the guidance of God's Holy Spirit to lead God's people to experience the love and mercy of God shared most clearly in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Pastors serve in this Church in a dynamic relationship with a congregation and its people. The responsibilities of the Pastoral Office are more than a job and ministry includes the entire people of God in that place. While Pastors bring gifts for leadership, the ministry they provide is but one piece of a complex mixture of the gifts the members of that congregation possess. Ministry happens when all the gifts are in operation in that place.

From time to time, God calls a Pastor to consider serving in a different setting. This involves moving to a new situation, leaving the relationships which have been established and setting up a fresh set of relationships. Making changes is never easy but change is the single constant in our lives. The natural reaction to change in our culture is grief, and people handle grief in a variety of ways. We learn from our experiences in life and Christians have a unique resource to assist them.

The resource the Church has going for it is the example of our Savior in his death and resurrection. We are a people who have received the benefits of new life in Christ and his resurrection opens the future for us. As we deal with change we have this sense of new beginnings and rebirth to encourage us. The transitions we experience in Christ's Church are set within our understanding of Christ's resurrection and hope. All Christians are constantly moving forward and reacting to the world around them with their faith. Since the ministry in a congregation includes the whole congregation, the bulk of the strength and potential does not change as a Pastor leaves. Congregations need to celebrate their inherent strength and potential as transitions occur.

While human beings are not likely to seek change, Christians may have a real step up on the culture in seeing God's Will at work in the process of transition. We are held safe and secure in spite of change and uncertainty and are at peace within the power of the resurrection. New life is what Christ calls all Christians to live and new situations are potentials for us to share the faith.

Change and transition are realities in our world and the Church of Jesus Christ is blessed to have a Savior who knows our griefs and fears and loves us into his future to continue to serve him. As Easter people we live with the encouragement of liberation, hope and rebirth. Congregations and Pastors are partners in the process of ministry, but it is the Lord of the Church who is served by all.

PASTORAL TRANSITION CHECKLIST

When Leaving a Call

- 1) Pray First.
- 2) Copy of the letter of resignation to Bishop and Dean.
- 3) As soon as a date is set for the last working service to the congregation, ask your Congregation Council President (vice-president if pastor is president) to call the Dean to arrange a meeting.
- 4) Inform Board of Pensions of effective dates of change of billing or retirement.
- 5) Review Healthy Transitions Packet, including covenants, with Dean, Congregation Council President and Healthy Transitions Resource Person.
- 6) Make plans with the congregation leadership for a farewell event including a farewell liturgy (sample in packet).
- 7) Make yourself available for members to say good-bye including visiting and communing homebound.
- 8) Save enough time to say your own good-byes, as well as for the moving chores. (Read one of the suggested resources in the Healthy Transitions Bibliography.)
- 9) If resigning without another call, write to the Bishop requesting to remain rostered as "On Leave From Call." If retiring, request Synod Council approval naming the effective date.
- 10) Be sure that the parish register is completely up to date and then call upon the Dean, who is obligated to examine these records and sign off on them before you leave.
- 11) Complete all financial obligations to and from the congregation, while signing off on a form stating this intention and return to the Dean.
- 12) It would be helpful to the vacancy/interim pastoral leader, and eventually the successor, that you provide a list of the homebound, including their name, address, telephone, and how to get to the house (use side door, right door front side, etc.)
- 13) Provide a list of upcoming pastoral acts to appropriate leadership people (weddings, baptisms, etc.) This would include names, phone numbers, dates, locations, directions, and other pertinent information.
- 14) Contact your nearest Synod Staff person to schedule an Exit interview. This is a way for us to learn from you how you viewed your ministry in this place, as well as to receive recommendations for those who follow after.

PASSAGES
A BIBLE STUDY FOR CONGREGATIONS AND PASTORAL LEADERS
IN HEALTHY TRANSITION

PASSAGES: A BIBLE STUDY

Transition: passage from one stage, state, place, or subject to another: **CHANGE**
Passage: the action or process of passing from one place or condition to another
(definitions: Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary)

REFLECTION:

Begin by sharing your thoughts about the following: Mitch Albom in his novel, "the five people you meet in heaven" begins with the following:

"This is a story about a man named Eddie and it begins at the end, with Eddie dying in the sun. It might seem strange to start a story with an ending. but all endings are also beginnings. We just don't know it at the time."

1. Think of a transitional time in your life (graduation, geographical move, marriage, divorce, illness, death of a loved one, new job, promotion, children off to college, etc. that was experienced as an ending but later was understood as a beginning.

How did you feel at the time?

What created anxiety for you at the time?

Where did you turn for strength and comfort?

BIBLE READING:

St. Paul's letter to the Philippians gives us an opportunity to study how a leader prepares himself/herself and those who depend on him/her for a difficult transitional time. Paul is imprisoned and facing death. There is a real possibility that Paul will never see those he has taught and loved again. The Philippians are facing the reality of a future without Paul at a time when there is dissension within the church and oppression from the outside. Throughout the entire letter Paul is a model of a leader whose faith in Jesus Christ give him joy, courage, and hope during a difficult transition.

Read Philippians 4:1-9

¹Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!

²I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to agree with each other in the Lord. ³Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

⁴Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

⁵Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

⁶Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

⁸Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things. ⁹Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me--put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

2. This is the conclusion of Paul's letter. How is Paul communicating his affection for the Philippians? What does he say about his relationship with them and why does he say it?
3. In vss. 2 and 3 Paul addresses a conflict within the congregation. Why does he do this now? How does he suggest that the conflict be resolved?
4. How does Paul suggest the Philippians move through this transitional time? What values and practices will be essential to transform this ending into a beginning? How can these same values and practices be incorporated into a transition you are facing now?
5. In verse 8 Paul suggests that the recipients of this letter intentionally focus on certain things. What are they? What dynamics, relationships, activities, and plans in your current situation could be described by the words in this verse?
6. *"Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put into practice."* Here Paul is hinting at the legacy he is leaving behind. What would you hope to be the legacy that you leave when you move from one stage, place, or condition to another? What do you want others to learn, receive, or hear from you? What do you need to learn, receive, or hear from others who may be leaving you and your circumstances.

FURTHER STUDY:

The Bible is a compilation of "passage" stories. God's people are described as those who are always experiencing change. They move from place to place, from doubt to faith, from life to death and to life again. Think about the great heroes and heroines in both the Old and New Testament. Moses, Ruth, Elijah, Jeremiah, Mary and Joseph, the disciples, Jesus, etc. Read about how they faced the difficult transitions in their lives. What resources did they rely on? How did each of them communicate their values to those who were affected by the transition? How did each of these Biblical "endings" become a "beginning".

REFLECTION ON OUR PRESENT TRANSITION

7. Where are we now as a congregation?
8. What have we learned in this study that will help us in the transition?
9. How have we said “good bye” to other pastoral leaders? Here in this congregation? In other congregations?
10. How did those pastors leave? Did they retire? Die? Leave for another call? Other?
11. Where is God leading us as a congregation now?
12. Above is a discussion of scriptural “passage” stories. Is there one story or scriptural text that describes us?

A PRAYER FOR BEGINNINGS:

This wonderful prayer can be found in the collection, “*Guerrillas of Grace*” by Ted Loder and published by Innisfree Press, Inc.

Read through the prayer silently.

13. What words or phrases speak to you as you contemplate transitions in your own life and in the life of your congregation?
14. What are the beginnings you hope will guide you through this time of endings?
15. What is your prayer for the congregation, your departing pastor and his/her family?
16. Close by praying for one another, your pastoral leader, the congregation, followed by praying together the prayer/poem.

I TREMBLE ON THE EDGE OF A MAYBE

**O god of beginnings, as your Spirit moved
Over the face of the deep on the first day of creation,
Move with me now in my time of beginnings,
when the air is rain-washed, the bloom is on the bush,
and the world seems fresh and full of possibilities,
and I feel ready and full**

**I tremble on the edge of a maybe,
A first time, a new thing, a tentative start,
And the wonder of it lays its fingers on my lips**

**In silence, Lord
I share now my eagerness and my uneasiness
about this something different
I would be or do;
And I listen for your leading
To help me separate the light from the darkness
In the change I seek to shape
And which is shaping me..**

RITE OF FAREWELL AND GODSPEED FOR PASTORS

(When set within the liturgy for Holy Communion, this order is used following the Post-Communion Prayer. A representative of the Synod or Dean presides at this rite.)

The Congregation may be seated

Hear the words addressed to the Philippians:

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayers and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you. I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at least you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it.”

(Philippians 4:4-10)

Our Lord Jesus Christ says: “Be dressed for action and have your lamps lit; be like those who are waiting for their master to return from the wedding banquet, so that they may open the door for him as soon as he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them. If he comes during the middle of the night, or near dawn, and finds them so, blessed are those slaves.”

(Luke 12:35-38)

THE DEPARTING PASTOR ADDRESSES THE CONGREGATION:

On the ____ day of _____, _____, I began ministry in this congregation. I have, with God’s help and to the best of my abilities exercised this trust. After prayer and careful consideration, I am now leaving this charge, and I publicly state that my tenure as pastor of this parish ends today.

THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYNOD OR DEAN SAYS:

Do you, the people of _____, recognize and accept the conclusion of this pastoral relationship?

Congregation: **We do.**

THE DEPARTING PASTOR MAY EXPRESS THANKSGIVING FOR THE TIME OF TENURE, with its joys and sorrows, and may state hopes for the future of the congregation.

A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SYNOD OR DEAN may then indicate what provision has been made for continuation of the ministries of the parish.

SIGNS OF THE OFFICE ARE RETURNED TO REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PARISH

The departing pastor joins the presiding minister at the Altar.

Pastor: Dear friends, through your call I have shared the responsibilities of ordained ministry in your midst. When I was installed, you presented me with symbols expressing my role among you. It is time to relinquish these symbols.

The presiding minister escorts the pastor to the front

Pastor: I have been among you to baptize, teach, and to forgive sins.
I now relinquish the sign of this office.

The Ewer of water (or shell) is given to a representative of the parish.

Congregation: **There is one Body and one Spirit, there is one hope in God's call to us.**

The presiding minister escorts the pastor to the pulpit.

Pastor: I have been among you to proclaim the good news.
I now relinquish the sign of this office.

A Bible is given to a representative of the parish.

Congregation: **The Word of the Lord is our sustaining strength.**

The presiding minister escorts the pastor to the altar.

Pastor: I have been among you to lead worship, and preside at the Holy Communion.
I now relinquish the sign of this office.

The chalice is given to a representative of the parish.

Congregation: **Taste and see that the Lord is good; happy are they who trust in God.**

The Congregation is invited to stand.

Pastor: It is time for me to go forth having restored to you the signs of office which you presented to me. I ask that you send me forth in your love.

Congregation: **May God's blessings be with you as you go forth from us.**

The Benediction



WHEN PASTORS RETIRE:

Reflections on Scripture by those who have retired

During the course of the research, the Healthy Transitions Task Force discovered that there was very little that there was very little that pointed to the spiritual, scriptural or prayer resources available to a pastor contemplating or entering retirement.

So we invited retired pastors in the Upstate New York Synod to share with us texts that they had found helpful as they transitioned into this new chapter of their life in ministry.

This booklet is the result. We share it with the prayer that it will be helpful for rostered leaders as they prepare for this significant time in their journey of life and faith.

Spring 2004
The Rev. M. Elaine Berg, Chair
Upstate New York Synod
Healthy Transitions Task Force

The Rev. Jean W. Barge

The verses that have meant the most to me are in Psalm 139, “You have known me from where I was in my mother’s womb” or something like that.

When there are times that I wonder about the church, its direction, and my own place in all of that, I am reminded that God knew me right from the beginning. After many stabs at other professions, I finally became a pastor and I guess that is what he always had in store for me. He knew me even from my mother’s womb.

I have had occasion to share this with others and it always has a profound effect. Maybe we retired people can tell any of God’s people how precious they are in His sight.

The Rev. Bob Doxey

I have thought a lot about your request for specific Bible verses that have helped my transition to “retired” (or as I prefer to think of it – “recycled”) status – AND THERE AREN’T ANY!

More and more, the “gestalt” nature of my faith is apparent! It’s the whole thing, rooting and grounding my life!

But there are a couple spiritual stances which may be helpful to others-

GRATITUDE that I can still be useful to the Synod/Church as a Vacancy Pastor and supply preacher. Being useful keeps me really alive.

HUMOR allows me to face a lined face and sagging body with composure – realizing that I am not all that important. It also acts as a bridge between me and other people – forming new friendships in strange churches and new tennis courts with pleasure and a sense of connectedness. Human connections keep me alive, too.

God bless our ministry, and thanks for giving me continued opportunities to practice mine.

The Rev. Wesley L. Hamlin, Jr.

One Biblical text that has been helpful to me in the transition into retirement is Psalm 18:2, “The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.” (RSV)

The prospect of retirement was/is scary in terms of life’s basic survival and identity questions. The former is addressed by such things as pension, social security, savings, health care and the life. The latter-that matter of identity-is even more crucial.

The Word reminds me that who I am is not tied to what I do, but in whose I am. It’s a matter of relationships-all of which make life so wonderful. I am Cindy’s husband, Liz and Steven’s father, Beatrice’s son...I am a baptized child of God. My ultimate security and identity is wrapped up in God – who is my rock, the one in whom I take refuge.

Prayer: O God, refuge and strength, rock and fortress, in the midst of life’s changes, help me to be grateful for life’s relationships and to trust in your gracious promises. In Christ I pray. Amen

The Rev. A. Starke Drischell

It is important for members of the Task Force to be apprised, first of all, of an excerpt from the course of study: CLERGY RETIREMENT 101.

Be it understood that in the eyes of the general public there is no such thing as “clergy retirement”. It is an incompatible term, an oxymoron. Clergy do not retire. That is a given.

In my own case, when I announced retirement there was a brief period of quiet, presumably for the information to filter in various directions, and then came the surprise. A nearby synod bishop had a church he wanted me to take over. He was quite persistent. A fellow clergyperson doing exceptional work in a specialized ministry wanted me to join him. A very active volunteer lady in our church who was recognized throughout the community listed a number of areas for me to consider. Her smiling comment was “Don’t worry, we won’t let you be inactive for long.”

That’s a sampling. The overtures were many.

I checked my commandments and found that nowhere did they forbid coveting my own time. So I did, for a while any way, and eventually filled in as interim pastor for a parish (which lasted for two years!).

Regarding the requests in the original communication, I really do not have “one biblical text” which helped me in my transition into retirement.” As you see, I really did not retire at first. I exchanged parishes for two years with the addition of a 40-mile round trip commute to our new home in Jamestown.

Pat and I considered our spiritual life questions for some insights. We had my Mother living with us by that time, invalided from a broken hip. Two of our children were married, the third embarked on a career. We had three grandchildren and counting. I served as supply pastor quite frequently. Our meditative life concentrated on morning time for scriptural study and prayer. When first fully retired with Sundays free, we found great stimulation from going to many churches, hearing the Word from various perspectives. There grew an increased sense of “awareness” of life and the world around. We finally chose a church and became involved. That’s not particularly helpful I suppose for any booklet.

One of my favorite passages is from John 10. It impacted my heart at the time of my Father’s death, years before realizing a call to the ministry: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand.” (John 10:27, 28) Dad’s faith was a living, practical commitment in the midst of the very worldly struggle to create a factory and product of quality. He worked 7 days a week for years in the Depression, but always my Mom and Dad brought us to church on Sunday (even though he left to head to Brooklyn to work afterward). I mourned him so deeply, and while praying and reading scripture, those two verses leaped out of the page to me.

I meditate on them periodically, and many are the shadings I sense. It is for me, truly living Word.

Prayer: “Dear Lord, loving God; you are always near, while I often wander. Forgive my willfulness. Bless my attention upon you. Help me to reflect from you to those around me by your Holy Spirit in me. And always, “Thank You!”

The Rev. Clarence W. Elliott

2 Timothy 4:2 Preach the Word... This was the text of my ordination sermon on a Sunday afternoon in 1959. As I approached retirement forty one years later, those words of Paul to Timothy took on an added meaning for me. I would be retiring; I would be leaving a congregation that for over thirty-three years had been "our family". The transition into retirement was NOT easy for me. Some time ago I asked a colleague how long it took him to adjust to retirement. His answer: "about twenty minutes." It took me two years! Maybe this is heresy, but I believe the old saying 'once a pastor, always a pastor.' I retired from being a pastor of a congregation. I did NOT retire from being a pastor. The mandate to preach the Word is for all pastors – the newly ordained, those in the midst of an active ministry, and those who have retired.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for being with me as I struggled with retirement. And, Lord, I am thankful that You will never retire. Amen

The Rev. Wilbur R. Freed

I appreciate your interest in any discoveries retired pastors have made over a lifetime of devotions, but ONE Biblical text? Come ON! I need 3.

The first text comes from the *Good News Bible*, "I have everything I need." The second, is Psalm 116, which is my personal testimony. The third is John 5:25, "I tell you the truth, whoever hears my words and believes in Him who sent me HAS eternal life. He shall NOT be judged, but HAS already passed from death to LIFE! That's present tense, already HAS Eternal Life! Hallelujah, Hallelujah! Something like Good News! Personal assurance from Jesus himself.

Like Paul says, we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses urging us on – (No matter what complication comes our way.) We are included in the family of Christ, and the Kingdom of God with his people from all times and places. Hallelujah, Praise and thanksgiving to Jesus Christ our Lord.

Prayer: Father, thank you for the gift of life as your people because of your son Jesus Christ our Lord. Help us to be strong in Faith, and to be your people with every day that is placed in our hands. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

The Rev. Jerry Wagner

As pastors, we have seen the various stages of life come and go. Now, for the first time, we realize that this present stage has finality written all over it. Our energy level, like it or not, has fallen markedly. Two or three hours on the tennis court – not any more! An hour and a half is about all we can muster now in our late seventies.

It is bad enough to deal with a lessening of health and strength, but even worse is a diminishing sense of purpose or worth. We came to know the reality of death as we ministered to those facing its prospect. Now, in our final years we are tempted to ask: "Is this all there is?"

Martin Luther certainly dealt with the same doubts and questions as we experience. He found his strength in the word of God, Psalm 118 vs. 17, "I will not die but live and proclaim the works of the Lord." Luther had this passage chiseled in German and Latin on a huge granite slab and placed at the entrance to his study at Feste Coberg where it remains to this day. A picture of this verse hangs above my desk and lives in my heart.

The Rev. James (Keen) Hilton

Hebrews 12:2, "Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end." (Good News Bible)

I always told our people that we should keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, then we would not be looking at each other with critical eyes.

In retirement it is absolutely necessary for me to keep my eyes fixed on Jesus. As we age, our mental powers dull, our bodily strength wanes, so, it's vital that we strengthen our spiritual life. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not unto your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him and he will direct your paths." (Proverbs 3:5) More and more I find myself standing like a little child before the Lord. In a sense, it is all I can do.

I read the Gospels and I John over and over. I love the assurance that "God is love." (I John 4:8, 16)

When I look to Jesus, I hear him say "Love God, Love your neighbor. Treat other people the way you would like to be treated." (No matter how they treat you!).

As we become less active, we may feel there is nothing we can do anymore. But we can always pray. We can always share Jesus, as we know Him, with someone else.

Some young people do not care for old people. They feel we are in the way. We must meet unkindness with kindness. It is Jesus' way. We must love like Jesus. He will help us always. How wonderful-wonder-filled!

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help us to trust you, help us to love like you and be kind to others. Amen.

The Rev. Robert J. Wennerstrom

In a small group I once used the following exercise. "Who are you?" "I'm an electrician." "I'm a pediatrician." People got their identity from their occupation.

I probably did the same, when I wasn't thinking deeply. What I really knew was that my identity did not come from my ordination or my call to a congregation; it comes from my baptism into Christ.

"I believe that Jesus Christ...is my Lord...he has saved and redeemed me...He has freed me...All this he has done that I may be his own, live under him in his kingdom, and serve him..." My identity comes from my redemption; that is what led me to answer God's call as a child, student, husband, father, citizen, worker in the communities where I lived and as a pastor.

Upon my retirement, my identity did not change. I did not fall apart. I am still a called-by-God servant of Jesus Christ, called now to serve in different ways.

I do not deny that at times it may be difficult for me to discern the next several callings God has for me and to say "Yes". Sometimes God calls me to "pass through the waters...the rivers; to walk through fire...and flame." But I believe God still says to me, "Thus says the Lord, he who created you...he who formed you...Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine (Is. 43:1-2)

The Rev. Dr. Lee M. Miller

Actually, the first thought that came to mind upon retirement was not biblical. With apologies to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., it was “Free at last, free at last....Thank God Almighty I’m free at last”.

More to the point you raise –

The verse remains one that has been with me since college: John 1:14 – And the Word became human and lived among us.

Yes, there is life upon retirement. And God continues to be active in it, just as God was before the calendar struck twelve (intentional mixed metaphor). In some respects I am freer to see the Word incarnate in our midst because my world is much larger now. I have the gifts of time and space, so that not only can I smell the roses, but I can discover what a great variety of them there are.

I remain convinced that God in Jesus Christ came for all people; my ongoing mission and ministry is to see and work for the visibility of that. It ranges from hearing “It’s A Small World After All” as a prayer to meeting and being with diverse peoples. Faith intersects culture – the Word becomes human. Then there is Hope – for all.

Prayer: Most gracious God, with thanksgiving for all that you have given us, especially in Jesus Christ, as well as for the opportunities that you set before us, I pray for your blessing on all the people. I also pray for a keen vision of “what can be”, so that I never become stuck in “what is”. In the name of Jesus. Amen

The Rev. Jack Printzenhoff

Reflection scripture: Matthew 6:25-34

Such a familiar passage, the text for many a sermon in my career. But then came the day of my retirement and I no longer had that dependable paycheck coming from the church. Suddenly I was cut loose and drifting into uncharted waters. Is my retirement income going to be enough? Am I going to have a lot of bureaucratic headaches dealing with Social Security and Medicare? And what about my sense of identity? Who am I and what do I do if I’m not the pastor of a congregation? Such were my anxieties that sometimes made sleep difficult and my stomach feel queasy.

The words of Jesus from his sermon on the mount took on a new meaning for me. “Don’t worry and ask yourselves, ‘Will we have anything to eat? Will we have anything to drink? Will we have any clothes to wear?’ Only people who don’t know God are always worrying about such things. Your Father in heaven knows that you need all of these.” A few verses earlier, Jesus asks a very simple and honest question: “Can worry make you live longer?”

Of course not! I decided to trust God’s care and, rather than worry, to live in the moment and enjoy those birds in the sky, the beauty of the wild flowers, and the glorious world that is his gift. And now I have time to do these things....but only if I want to!

Prayer: Lord, thank you for taking care of me throughout my life. Help me to put aside worry and truly enjoy these days in trust and gratitude. Amen

**HEALTHY TRANSITIONS
COVENANT FOR CONGREGATIONS**

Statement of Mission (*use mission statement of congregation, if available or synod mission statement*)

As Christians we are all baptized into the priesthood of Christ to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. It has been our privilege to recognize and support the mission and ministry of _____ (name) as pastor _____ (congregation)

at _____ (place).

The Congregation Council of _____ (congregation) at

_____ (place) on behalf of the congregation has a prayerful conversation discussed the intent and policy of the Healthy Transition documents of the Upstate New York Synod, ELCA, and enter into the following covenant:

We agree:

- a. We promise to pray for the ongoing mission of our congregation and for our pastoral leadership past, present and future; and
- b. to respect the terms of the attached covenant of the Rev. _____ (name); and
- c. to interpret the terms of the Covenant to the congregation; and
- d. to incorporate the Covenant in the minutes of a called Congregation Council meeting; and
- e. to communicate in writing and conversation the terms of the Covenant which terminates the pastoral relationship with named pastor; and
- f. to refrain from asking the former pastor to perform pastoral functions and to remind members likewise to refrain from making requests; and
- g. to show respect and regard for our new pastoral leader (interim, vacancy and successor) by allowing him/her to perform his/her pastoral duties; and to encourage members to come to the new pastoral leader; and
- h. to celebrate what will be as we honor what was; and further

Other items may be added that are consistent with the particular relationship and Mission of _____ congregation.

It is understood that this covenant does not affect or require termination of friendships with individuals in _____(congregation) at

_____ (place).

Date: _____ Pastor: _____(signature)

Congregation Council President: _____(signature)

Date witnessed by Congregation Council: _____

Date shared with congregation: _____

Congregation Council Secretary: _____(signature)

Attested to by: _____(Representative of Synod or Bishop)

**HEALTHY TRANSITIONS
MODEL COVENANT DEPARTING PASTOR**

Statement of Mission (*use mission statement of congregation, if available or synod mission statement*):

As Christians we are all baptized into the priesthood of Christ to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. It has been my privilege to recognize and support the mission and ministry of _____(congregation) as pastor.

The Rev. _____, in prayerful conversation with the Congregation Council of _____(congregation) at _____(place) discussed the intent and policy of the Upstate New York Synod, ELCA, and enters into the following covenant:

I, Pastor _____(name) pledge to support the continuing ministry of _____(congregation) at _____(place) and its future called and ordained pastor.

I agree to the following:

- a) I promise to continue to pray, support and respect the ministry of the congregation and a new pastoral leader; and
- b) to abide by the guidelines established by the Upstate New York Synod and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; and
- c) not to be involved in any leadership or advisory role (public or private); and
- d) not to intervene, support or give advice to anyone involved in a congregation disagreement or dispute and to refrain from language or behavior that could undermine the transitions necessary for the congregation and the development of the relationship between the congregation and a new pastoral leader; and
- e) to refuse requests for pastoral services made by members of the congregation, including visiting the sick and homebound; and
- f) to consult with the (interim, vacancy, or successor) pastor regarding visiting, attending worship or special events; and
- g) not to officiate in any special events or in the lives of members of the congregation, including weddings, funerals, baptisms, worship leadership, church anniversary activities. On rare occasions the new pastoral leader may invite a predecessor pastor to participate in a congregational event; and
- h) to refrain from giving opinions or directions regarding church business that could undermine the transitions necessary for the congregation and the development of the relationship between the congregation and a new pastoral leader; and further
- i) to encourage my family members to support me in maintaining the covenant and to support the ministry of the new pastoral leader; and further

Other items may be added that are consistent with the particular relationship and mission of _____(congregation). _____

It is understood that this covenant does not affect or require termination of friendships with individuals in _____(congregation) at _____(place).

Date: _____

Pastor: _____(signature)

Congregation Council President: _____(signature)

Date witnessed by Congregation Council: _____

Date shared with congregation: _____

Congregation Council Secretary: _____(signature)

Attested to by: _____(Representative of Synod or Bishop)

**HEALTHY TRANSITIONS
MODEL COVENANT FOR DEPARTING FAMILY**

*(This is an optional model that may be used if predecessor
pastoral family members wish to participate in the covenant process.)*

Statement of Mission *(use mission statement of congregation, if available or synod mission statement)*:

As Christians we are all baptized into the priesthood of Christ to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. It has been our privilege to recognize and support the mission and ministry of _____(congregation). as our husband/wife/parent/sibling served as its pastor.

We, the family of the Rev. _____, in prayerful conversation with the Congregation Council of _____(congregation) at _____(place) discussed the intent and policy of the Upstate New York Synod, ELCA.

We pledge to support the continuing ministry of the congregation and its future called and ordained pastor, as well as his/her family.

We agree to the following:

- a. We promise to continue to pray for and support the congregation as It lives out its mission and ministry; and
- b. to consult with the new pastoral leader regarding involvement in the life and ministry of the congregation; and
- c. to refer requests for pastoral services to the new pastoral leader; and
- d. to refrain from language or behavior that could undermine the transitions necessary for the congregation and the development of the relationship between the congregation and a new pastoral leader; and further

Other items may be added that are consistent with the particular relationship and mission of _____(congregation). _____

It is understood that this covenant does not affect or require termination of our friendships with

individuals in _____(congregation) at _____(place).

Date: _____

Representative of Pastoral Family: _____(signature)

Congregation Council President: _____(signature)

Date witnessed by Congregation Council: _____

Date shared with congregation: _____

Congregation Council Secretary: _____(signature)

Attested to by: _____(Representative of Synod or Bishop)

HEALTHY TRANSITIONS MODEL COVENANT ARRIVING PASTOR

(This covenant is an optional model, which an arriving pastoral leader might choose to make with the congregation and predecessor pastoral leader.)

Statement of Mission *(use mission statement of congregation, if available or synod mission statement):*

As Christians we are all baptized into the priesthood of Christ to offer ourselves to the Lord of the Church in thanksgiving for what he has done and continues to do for us. It is my/our privilege to recognize and support the ministry of _____(congregation) as pastor.

I, Pastor, _____, in prayerful conversation with the Congregation

Council of _____(congregation) at _____(place) discussed the intent and policy of the Healthy Transitions document of Upstate New York Synod, ELCA, and enter into the following covenant:

I agree to the following:

- a) I promise to pray for my predecessor in his/her ministry for the sake of the mission of the church; and
- b) to speak to the good and positive word about my predecessor(s) and the relationship(s) he had with the congregation, but not to yield my pastoral role, and
- c) if my predecessor lives in this community or area of _____(congregation) to treat him/her as a valued pastoral colleague, neighbor, and/or member of this parish; and further

Other items may be added as appropriate to the specific relationship involved: _____

It is understood that this covenant does not affect or require termination of friendships my predecessor and his/her family may have with individuals in _____(congregation) at _____(place).

Date: _____

Pastor: _____(signature)

Congregation Council President: _____(signature)

Date witnessed by Congregation Council: _____

Date shared with Congregation: _____

Congregational Council Secretary: _____(signature)

Attested to by: _____(Representative of Synod or Bishop)

Optional: Date shared with predecessor pastoral leader: _____

SAYING GOOD-BYE

By The Rev. Cynthia K. Hileman
Metropolitan Chicago Synod

The resignation of a pastor from his/her congregation is a difficult transition. It is challenging for both the pastor and the parishioners as the pastoral relationship ends and new relationship boundaries are established. For congregations, it can be a time of grief, anxiety, and confusion. Saying good-bye is never easy.

A good pastoral relationship is a blessing. Congregations who have been served competently and compassionately by a pastor often want the continued pastoral relationship and presence of the former pastor at their family's wedding, funeral, or baptism. When a pastor resigns, he/she may be asked to do numerous "special occasions". This is a delicate area and painful for lay people and pastors alike.

Upon leaving a congregation, it is not appropriate for the former pastor to continue to function in that role by performing pastoral acts for former parishioners. This is most difficult for people to comprehend. The pastoral act of presiding at those services, however, belongs to the interim or newly called pastor.

Former Pastors: The responsibility of establishing boundaries is yours. When asked by former parishioners, respond immediately. "It's simply not proper for me to do that. I'm not your pastor anymore, but thanks for considering me. I would love to come as a guest, if able, as your other friends do."

Parishioners: Don't ask. It is awkward for both the current and former pastors. Honor your former pastor by inviting him/her to come as a guest. Show respect and regard to the new pastor by allowing him/her to perform his/her pastoral duties.

Current Pastors: Speak a good and positive word about your predecessor and the relationship the former pastor had with the congregation, but do not yield your pastoral role.

The transition from one pastor to another, while an exciting journey, is also one that is difficult to navigate. Yet, with God's help, we can discover the life-giving opportunity that is change. With the Spirit's power, we can let go of the old and reach out for the new.

Here's an example of how one of our pastors handled the transition. Pastor Mary Hartmann recently retired after 30 years of pastoral service at Bethel Lutheran, Wahpeton. The following was printed in the newsletter. *[Task Force Note: The following is not the Upstate NY Synod policy, but is a sample of one pastor's experience.]*

"Brief Recap of Retirement Policy for Pastor"

Pastor _____ will not be available to conduct or even participate in such events as funerals, weddings, baptisms, hospital calls, emergency calls or any other functions normally carried out by a pastor in a congregation.

Pastor _____ will not be available to take any other kind of leadership role with a board, committee or task force within the congregation.

Pastor _____ and his wife expect to worship, commune, take minor roles, socialize and maintain friendships as in the past.

HEALTHY TRANSITIONS BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *Guiding Your Church Staff Through Staff Transition: for Congregational and Agency Leaders* (Leadership Support, Division for Ministry, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
2. *Reflections on Leaving and Entering a Ministry Setting: for Pastor and Associate in Ministry* (Leadership Support, Division for Ministry, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
3. *Running Through the Thistles: Terminating a Ministerial Relationship with a Parish* (Roy M. Oswald, Alban Institute)
4. *Ending Well, Starting Strong: Your Personal Pastorate Start-up Workshop* (Roy M. Oswald, Alban Institute)
5. *Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors* (Edward A. White; Alban Institute)
6. *Critical Moment of Ministry: A Change of Pastors* (Loren B. Mead; Alban Institute)
7. *Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Institute Handbook for Clergy Transitions* (Roy M. Oswald, James M. Heath and Ann W. Heath; Alban Institute)
8. *Praying Our Goodbyes* (Joyce Rupp; Ave Maria Pres; Notre Dame, Indiana)

Note: Most of these resources and other material on the subject of transitions are available from the Synod Library. If you want to check for new material, you may want to consult the Alban Institute Catalog or website: www.Alban.org