

Exit and Entrance: Patterns, Emotions and the Wilderness Resource Section



**“All changes, even the most
longed for, have their
melancholy; for what we leave
behind us is a part of ourselves;
we must die to one life before we
can enter into another.”**

Anatole France



Purpose

To help participants understand that the success of a transition depends in part upon how exits and entrances are handled, to reflect on their own exits and entrances, and become more intentional about entrance into new ministry.

Theological Understanding

To begin a new life requires relinquishing the old. In Scripture this is often portrayed as the wilderness time. In the Exodus story the Israelites wandered for 40 years. Those who had known Egypt and God’s miracles in the desert could not cross into the Promised Land because they had not let go of the old life and believed. Jesus’ public transformation from carpenter of Nazareth to prophet and teacher is marked by the 40 days in the wilderness which follows his baptism. In both stories, temptations occur and yet God is there, feeding his people with manna and sending his angels to tend them.

In the wilderness of transition, it is helpful to think about what we need to relinquish to fully enter into our new lives; to consider what has tempted us; and to acknowledge those angels who have tended us during this time.

Special Instructions

When using this module with mixed clergy-lay groups have the clergy complete Handout 1 while the laity complete Handout 2, then have them meet in congregation teams to reflect on their respective experiences of transition. For clergy-only groups have each participant complete all handouts. A variation of this module to use in a congregational setting is included in the two versions of **“Fresh Start in Your Congregation: A Resource.”**

Related modules

History-Sharing for Understanding
Profile vs. Reality
Transition

Bibliography

Bridges, William; Managing Transitions, 2nd Edition; Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2003 – describes model of transition vs. change, how transitions effect organizations, and what an effective leader in times of transition should do.

_____ ; Transitions: Making Sense of Life's Changes; Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1980 – focuses on transitions in personal life, outlining model of transition vs. change.

Mead, Loren B.; A Change of Pastors and How It Affects Change in the Congregation; Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005 – a general introduction to pastoral transitions in congregations.

Oswald, Roy; Heath, James M; and Heath, Ann W.; Beginning Ministry Together: The Alban Handbook for Clergy Transitions; Herndon, VA; The Alban Institute, 2003 – a detailed walk through the search and transition process suitable for both lay leaders in a congregation undergoing a change of rectors and clergy (with a special section for clergy in transition that speaks to exits and entrances).

Oswald, Roy; New Beginnings: A Pastorate Start Up Workbook; Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1989 – personal workbook for clergy going through a transition to a new ministry.

White, Edward A.; Saying Goodbye: A Time of Growth for Congregations and Pastors; Herndon; The Alban Institute, 1990 – a series of essays for clergy and lay leaders on the experience of saying good-bye and raising questions about the relationship of rectors to their former congregations.

General Outline of Session

1. Opening prayer and meditation (suggested reading, Mark 1:12-13, as it sets the stage for a later discussion of what the “wilderness” has been like)
2. Check-in
3. Introduce concept of a good exit makes for a good beginning (PowerPoint 1; Talking Points)
4. Reflecting on patterns of exits and entrances (PowerPoint 2 – 3; Talking Points – general discussion)
5. **For clergy** – reflecting on exit from previous position (PowerPoint 4; Talking Points; Handout 1 – individual work)
6. **For clergy-only groups:** small group discussion and debrief in large group
7. Reflecting on exit of former rector/assistant (PowerPoint 5; Talking Points; Handout 2 – individual work)
8.
 - a. **For clergy-only groups:** small group discussion
 - b. **For mixed clergy-lay groups:** congregation team discussion of respective experience of exits.
9. Sharing of observations in large group
10. Reflecting on entrance into congregation (PowerPoint 6; Talking Points; Handout 3 – small group or congregation team discussion)
11. Sharing of observations in large group
12. Reflecting on the transition time (PowerPoint 7; Talking Points; Handout 4 – individual work, small group or congregation team discussions)
13. Sharing of observations in large group
14. Thinking about acknowledgements needed and prayer for future (PowerPoint 8 – 9); Talking Points)
15. Wrap up (rereading of Mark 1:12-13)

Exit and Entrance Handout 1

From the point of view of the new clergy person:

How were the “good-byes” needed in this transition handled? Were there subgroups (e.g., shut-ins, a colleague group, a field education parish) to whom you said “good-bye” in a special way? How about groups outside the congregation such as community boards or ecumenical groups? Describe.

Is there a family involved? How did they say good-bye? How did the congregation/community say good-bye to them?

Are there still unfinished pieces to the good-byes? What could be done to tie up these loose ends and what help is needed?



Exit and Entrance Handout 2

From the point of view of the congregation:

Describe the circumstances under which the former rector/assistant* left. Was there a chance for him/her to say “good-bye”? Were there subgroups (e.g., shut-ins, a colleague group, a field education parish) that said “good-bye” in a special way? How about groups outside the congregation such as community boards or ecumenical groups? Describe.

Are there still unfinished pieces to that good-bye? What could be done and what help is needed?

What legacy did the former rector/assistant leave behind to build upon?

**Note: If there was no immediate predecessor, who handled the ministry responsibilities? How did that person transfer responsibility? How has that person set boundaries on the expectations of people who used to work with/be ministered to by him/her? Are there still things that need to be done? What legacy did he/she leave to build upon?*

Exit and Entrance Handout 3

How were the introductions handled? How about any family members involved?
What was the first Sunday in the congregation like?

What intentional processes have been followed to help you/the new clergyperson get to know members of the congregation and of certain key subgroups (e.g., the choir, the Altar Guild)?

How is your/the new clergyperson's family being incorporated into the life of the congregation?

How is information being shared about and with parishioners who aren't there regularly (e.g., shut-ins)?

How is information about the congregation's history, culture and expectations being shared?

What still needs to be done to make everyone feel "at home"? Who might help?



Exit and Entrance Handout 4

What was or is the “wilderness” like?

What or who tempted you to take an easy way through the process (“Satan”)?

What or who are the “beasts” that have made the transition difficult or that you fear may make it difficult?

Who are the “angels” who are helping you, feeding you, making the time blessed?

Have your “angels” been thanked? If not, what plans can you make **now** to do so?

What is your prayer for your relationship with the congregation/clergyperson this coming year?