

# Transition Resource Section

## Purpose

To help participants understand the difference between change – an event – and transition – the process of changing. This process is complex, multi-leveled and experienced in different ways by individuals and congregations. By learning how to assess where people are in their transition and by responding in appropriate ways, we foster healthy transitions and promote acceptance of change.

## Theological Understanding

The God of creation is constantly working; therefore change is a normal part of life. Life itself is a journey, with many endings and beginnings. Our task is to help the community listen to the Spirit and help bring about the *change that God is calling forth*, leading them along the journey in ways that are respectful of where they are as well. The Exodus story serves as a great illustration of both the work of the people to listen to the call of God and of the leadership skills needed to bring the people through the wilderness.

## Special Instructions

When using this module with a mixed clergy-lay group, have your small group discussions in parish teams. If not all parishes have teams at the session or you are using this module with a clergy-only group, people can share their experiences across congregational lines. Begin the session with Exodus 16:1-3 or engage the group in retelling the story of Exodus, emphasizing the taking of Joseph's bones, the wandering in the wilderness, the people who left or worshipped the Golden Calf. You might end the opening part with a prayer for transition (see one by The Rev. Canon Kristi Philip that follows in this resource section). At the end of the session consider playing Fran McKendree's version of "Fear of Transformation" or reading the words of that song (also reprinted in this section). A closing prayer based on that song by Sandra C. Kolb is found later in this resource section.

## Related Modules

Conflict: Modules I & II  
Exit and Entrance  
Leading Planned Change



## **Bibliography**

Bridges, William; Managing Transitions, 2<sup>nd</sup> 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 M.; 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.

Spencer, Sabina A. and Adams, John D.; Life Changes: Growing through Personal Transitions; San Luis Obispo, CA: Impact Publishers, 1990 – a slightly different model for transitions, but consistent with Bridges' basic theory; focuses on personal transitions and provides questions to guide the individual through the process.

## **Other Resources**

McKendree, Fran. The Fear of Transformation, audio CD. Purchase the CD or download as an MP3 (look under Music) at [www.franmckendree.com](http://www.franmckendree.com).

William Bridges uses the story of Moses to illustrate leadership in times of transition. The story can be downloaded free from Bridges' web site ([www.wmbridges.com](http://www.wmbridges.com) – under Articles look for “Getting Them Through the Wilderness”).

## General Outline of Session

1. Opening meditation (suggested reading Exodus 16:1-3; prayer by the Rev. Canon Kristi Philips)
2. Discussion of what they heard in story (PowerPoint 1; Talking Points)
3. Overview of the concept of change vs. transition (PowerPoint 2 – 4; Talking Points).
4. Thinking about a past transition – individual reflection; discussion with partner or small group OR large group discussion (PowerPoint 5; Talking Points; Handout 1)
5. Debrief “what did you learn?” in whole group if discussions have taken place in subgroups.
6. More about transition (PowerPoint 6-11; Talking Points)
7. Thinking about self in transition (Handout 2; PowerPoint 12; Talking Points; small or large group discussion)
8. Debrief “what did you learn?” in whole group if discussions have taken place in subgroups.
9. Thinking about your congregation in transition (Handout 3; PowerPoint 13; Talking Points; small or large group discussion).
10. Debrief “what did you learn?” in whole group if discussions have taken place in subgroups.
11. Wrap up with any general comments and a final prayer, playing of the Fran McKendree recording of “The Fear of Transformation,” or a reading of the words of that song (PowerPoint 14; Talking Points; prayer by Sandra C. Kolb).

## **A Prayer for Transition**

The Rev. Canon Kristi Philip

Ever-present God,  
You call us on a journey to a place we do not know.  
We are not where we started.  
We have not reached our destination.  
We are not sure where we are or who we are.  
This is not a comfortable place.  
Be among us, we pray.  
Calm our fears, save us from discouragement,  
And help us stay on course.  
Open our hearts to your guidance so that our journey to this  
Unknown place continues as a journey of trust.

*Amen*

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## **A Prayer for Fresh Start Transitions**

Sandra C. Kolb

Ever-present God  
    May we remember that  
        In the no-where  
            You fed us with the bread of angels;  
    From the no-thing  
        You created a new covenant with your people  
    By crossing the no-place  
        We entered a land flowing with milk and honey.

    Be with us now, instilling us with courage and faith  
        That we may choose life;  
        That we may learn to fly.

*Amen*

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## The Parable of the Trapeze

### *Turning the fear of transformation into the transformation of fear...*

Sometimes I feel that my life is a series of trapeze swings. I'm either hanging on to a trapeze bar swinging along or, for a few moments in my life, I'm hurtling across space in between trapeze bars.

Most of the time, I spend my life hanging for dear life to my trapeze-bar-of-the-moment. It carries me along at a certain steady rate of swing and I have the feeling that I'm in control of my life. I know most of the right questions and even some of the answers.

But, every once in a while as I'm merrily (or even not-so-merrily) swinging along, I look out ahead of me into the distance and what do I see? I see another trapeze bar swinging toward me. It's empty and I know, in that place in me that knows, that this new trapeze bar has my name on it. It is my next step, my growth, my aliveness coming to get me. In my heart of hearts I know that, for me to grow, I must release my grip on this present, well known bar and move to the new one.

Each time it happens to me I hope (no, I pray) that I won't have to let go of my old bar completely before I grab the new one. But in my knowing place, I know that I must totally release my grasp on my old bar and, for some moment in time, I must hurtle across space before I can grab onto the new bar.

Each time, I am filled with terror. It doesn't matter that in all my previous hurtles across the void of unknowing I have always made it. I am each time afraid that I will miss, that I will be crushed on unseen rocks in the bottomless chasm between bars. I do it anyway. Perhaps this is the essence of what the mystics call the faith experience. No guarantees, no net, no insurance policy, but you do it anyway because somehow to keep hanging on to that old bar is no longer on the list of alternatives. So, for an eternity that can last a microsecond or a thousand lifetimes, I soar across the dark void of "the past is gone, the future is not here yet." It's called "transition." I have come to believe that this transition is the only place that real change occurs. I mean real change, not the pseudo-change that only lasts until the next time my old buttons get punched.

I have noticed that, in our culture, this transition zone is looked upon as a "no-thing," a no-place between places. Sure, the old trapeze bar was real, and that new one coming towards me, I hope that's real, too. But the void in between? Is that just a scary, confusing, disorienting nowhere that must be gotten through as fast and as unconsciously as possible?

NO! What a wasted opportunity that would be. I have a sneaking suspicion that the transition zone is the only real thing and the bars are illusions we dream up to avoid the void where the real change, the real growth, occurs for us. Whether or not my hunch is true, it remains that the transition zones in our lives are incredibly rich places. They should be honored, even savored. Yes, with all the pain and fear and feelings of being out of control that can (but not necessarily) accompany transitions, they are still the most alive, most growth-filled, passionate, expansive moments of our lives.

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# Experience with Transitions Handout 1

Think about a time of significant change in your life (other than the one you are currently experiencing in your congregation) – for example, graduating from school, getting married, moving to a new city, losing someone close to you:

Briefly describe the change:

What “ended”?

When did life feel “normal” again? What were the signs that this was so?

What did you do to help life feel “normal” again? What did others do?

## Self in Transition Handout 2

What do or did you have to let go of in this current transition?

What nourishes you in this time of transition?

What will make congregational life feel “normal” again for you? What signs do you see that this is already happening? What continues to challenge you or trip you up?

What signs do you see in yourself of wanting to return to the past or of uncharacteristic behaviors?

Where are you on a scale of 1 (still looking back) to 10 (firmly into the new relationship)? What signs do you see that tell you which phase you are in? What can you or others do to help you move through the transition?

*Transition feels like the time between trapezes ...*





## **Congregation in Transition Handout 3**

What does or did the congregation have to let go of (e.g., ways of doing things, expectations of role, power or control over activities) in order to fully welcome new leadership?

What will make the congregation feel that you are/the new clergy person is a part of them? What signs do you see that this is already happening? What continues to challenge members or trip them up?

What signs do you see of wanting to return to the past or of uncharacteristic behavior?

What percentage of the people are still trying to “let go;” what percentage are in the “wilderness;” and what percentage have moved into full acceptance of the new leadership? What signs do you see of each of these phases? On a scale from 1 (letting go) to 10 (beginning a new relationship), where would you place the congregation as a whole?

Given your experience with transitions, what can you do to help people move through this transition? What can others do?