

FROM THE DESK OF BISHOP MAAS

TRANSITIONS & THRESHOLDS



Sometimes the inspiration for these little articles comes from scripture. Other times it's a quotation from a wise person. This month, it's Home Depot.

I'm not much of a do-it-yourselfer, but I like to try. So I've wandered the aisles of my local Home Depot (and Lowe's and Menard's) looking for all manner of things. When we landed on the theme "transitions and thresholds" for this month's e-news, I recalled that that's a place I'd seen those terms

before. When I had to cover the gap at the bottom of an interior doorway, I bought a transition strip. And when I had to replace the bottom of an exterior doorway, I had to buy a threshold.

That's simple, but it works for me—a person transitions from one interior room to another, and crosses a threshold to head into the great outdoors. That helps me distinguish my own experiences, and those of others. A transition is a move from one known space to another, within the overall confines of the same structure; a threshold is crossed when one steps out of the familiarity of a structure into the wide open space of the largely unknown.

These are concepts of course, not rigid frameworks, and they don't look the same for everyone—what some consider making a transition is for others crossing a threshold, and vice-versa. But the distinction can be helpful, and it's one we get to choose.

We're at a season in the lives of our congregations where transitions and thresholds are about to be experienced. As summer begins to yield to fall, a new program year will begin for Sunday School, Confirmation, all manner of Faith Formation. Students will advance another year in their studies—second graders will become third graders, middle schoolers will become high schoolers, and so on. Another harvest will be upon us. The green liturgical season will end.

Here in the synod office there'll be transitions and thresholds as well, as we prepare for the

departure of a bishop and some staff and the arrival of a new bishop and other staff. Those who are continuing will experience transitions; those who are departing and arriving will cross thresholds.

The church as a whole is in a season of transitions and thresholds as well. Though it's far from over, our experience of COVID has wrought changes in the church at large, in our congregations, and among our members. Many of us are experiencing the shift to almost-post-pandemic time as a transition—or we're trying to. We've stepped (been pushed) out of the familiar into a new space, and we're eager to step back into what we knew before.

Others of us recognize this shift as crossing a threshold—leaving behind the familiar, knowing it can't be restored, and stepping into something new and largely unknown. As with changes in our personal lives, how we live into this shift is dependent on our perspective—a perspective we get to choose.

The temptation is strong to lean into the next era, the post-pandemic era of the church by way of transition; something different but largely familiar, comforting and secure. The downside to that is that—let's be honest—what we were doing as church pre-pandemic wasn't really working. The world continues to change around us more rapidly than we adapt to it.

COVID forced some rapid changes, and many of them were good ones. We now have the opportunity to cross a threshold into something new in the life of the church, bringing with us those changes and looking to an open horizon full of possibilities, of experiments, of still more changes.

My prayer for all of us is that the transitions that come our way will be smooth and that the thresholds we cross will draw us to exciting new adventures. And I pray all the more that when we get to those moments when it's ours to decide how we'll navigate change, we'll pause in wonder, utter a prayer and trust the Spirit's presence (the future is not a do-it-yourself project) as we step boldly over a threshold into the unbounded possibilities that God lays before us.