



A Choice of Direction
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Remember when...? Over the last 8 months, I've become nostalgic about what used to be: I could go anywhere I wanted without a mask; I could visit and play with family and friends. Now that seems like a distant past, fading from memory. Have you had those moments watching tv when it strikes you as odd or scary that the actors aren't masked up? Then you remember, that's the way it used to be, way back when...in February.

In the church, we're skilled at reminiscing. We remember when we snuggled into pews next to our neighbors, sharing hymnals and passing friendship pads. We shared conversation and coffee and hugs. Remember when passing the peace during flu season was only a marginal risk?

We are determined that this pandemic will not keep us down. We're not giving in, and as soon as it's safe, we'll be back in full ministry form. We can bounce back from this.

Or should we?

In a recent call with mid-council (presbytery and synod) leaders of the denomination, our General Assembly co-moderator Gregory Bentley spoke about the difference between bouncing back and bouncing forward. He urged the latter.

The concept of bouncing forward is prominent in resilience psychology, including a book by the same name authored by Michaela Haas. We bounce forward by turning adversity into opportunity, rather than simply returning to what was.

Truth be told, life wasn't perfect in February. We had our share of struggles in ministry, and we might have been actively looking at how to increase congregational vitality, attendance, giving, or membership. Do we really want to bounce back to all of that? Or, can we do a careful audit of what was really going well in February and bounce forward with that into 2021? Our resilience won't be judged by whether we recreate everything that used to be, but whether we keep what was really good and shed what was only marginal.

The pandemic has given us the gift of space for reflection. That doesn't diminish the horrific loss of lives and destruction of livelihoods, but it has undeniably pushed paused on how our ministries are run. We're going to bounce one way or another. In this liminal time, we are being given the choice of direction: do we bounce backward or forward?

