



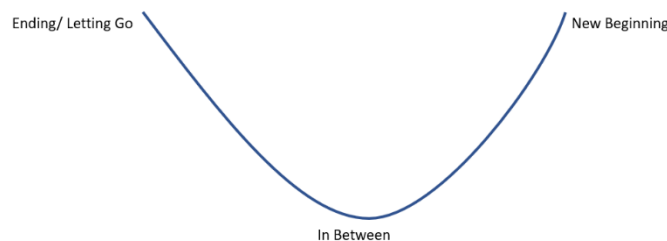
Look Backward
September 7, 2022
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Sometimes we learn lessons the hard way. That happened to me this past week. Since you've known me, I've been encouraging us to look forward – to imagine the future that lies ahead as we discern God's intentions for the Church. I've cautioned against spending too much time focused on the past and the way things were, whether we are just looking backward to pre-pandemic times or back to days when the church was teeming with people.

I've updated my opinion. Sometimes we need to look backward. I learned that the hard way last week. On the short drive from my house to my mother's, I rounded a corner and heard a loud thunk on the side of my car. "What was that?" my mother asked from the passenger seat. I couldn't tell her, at least not exactly. Using my side mirror, I reported, "It's a rectangular thing." In my mirror, I watched it bounce down the road. As I continued driving, I tried to puzzle it out. I hadn't seen anything in the road ahead of me. I knew it couldn't be part of my car because the rectangle was pink. Pink! "Oh crud," I muttered as I turned the car around, "it's my phone." My pink cell phone. A pink rectangle bouncing down the road. I remembered laying it on top of the car as I was loading items into the backseat. I pulled up beside it and watched as cars rumbled by it within inches, until traffic cleared enough for me to dart into the road and retrieve it.

So, I've updated my opinion. It's good from time to time to look back. We need to make sure that we're not leaving behind items of value or important tools that we'll need when we get where we're going.

William Bridges was a secular consultant on change management, whose ideas have been widely embraced by church leaders. In his book, *Managing Transitions, Making the Most of Change* (4th ed. by S. Bridges), Bridges breaks the management of transitions down into a 3-phase process that people will go through to internalize and cope with the change. These phases, or zones, can be depicted on an inverse bell curve:



During this Ending/Letting Go time, we let loose of some of the structures, programs, or processes that served us well in the past, but no longer do. However, we shouldn't get mired in our melancholy about what is changing or being lost because we'll never move forward. Instead, the Ending/Letting Go zone is a time to celebrate what has been, by looking backward. Most important for today's reflection, this first zone gives us the chance to claim what is valuable to us – those characteristics that we want to bring forward into the new beginning to ground us. It's a time to name our core values and what we hold dear, so that they don't just bounce down the road behind us.

Milwaukee Presbytery will be entering this transition process with the eventual search and hire of an Interim Presbytery Executive. I'm excited for you to explore what God desires for the Presbytery and this geographic witness to Christ. I pray that you will hold on to so much of the good I have seen in you and carry it forward. Your special care for each other, your passion to serve Christ and neighbor, your ability to laugh at yourselves and to try new things, and your faithfulness to Scripture are all characteristics that will serve you well.