

A time to keep and a time to throw away

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I have moved a lot, and by move, I mean pack up all of my belongings and take them out of one dwelling and unpack them in another dwelling. I, with or without my family, moved in 1966, 1968, 1972, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2008, and 2011. That's a lot of cardboard and bubblewrap.

Each time I have moved as an adult, I have purged before and after the move. I am so happy for those who love garage sales, but I'm not one of you, so the Goodwill and Salvation Army have benefitted much from my peripatetic life. Each time I have moved I have looked forward to the new thing and at the same time mourned all that is left behind. During the crunch time of moving, I've have lived in two places at once, said hello while saying goodbye, closed things up and opened new things.

Serving as a pastor in a mainline church in the 21st century feels like being in the throes of moving. I am in two worlds at once. I am in the world for which I was trained in seminary, serving a church with the physical plant and administration of yesteryear. I am in my old house, and while it does creak, I know which floorboards creak. It is a comfortable place. And God is calling me—and us—to move.

Not only do I feel completely unprepared to be a postmodern pastor of a church in the 21st century, I am living in two places at once. I am still pastoring in 20th-century mode, supporting our work done in the 20th century, leading worship in the style of the old way. I am trying to learn about the new ways, too, and find it getting hard to be holding on to the old stuff while making room for the new stuff. A good purge is needed.

We once lived in a house that was taken by eminent domain and torn down. The evening after the wrecking ball finished its work, I drove by the old place, saw the pile of rubble that had been the home we brought our baby daughter to, and sobbed. Some folks had lined up across the street to watch the destruction, but I couldn't do it. It felt violent, somehow. Now there's a brand new fire station there,

one that the city needed. Intellectually it all makes sense. Emotionally, it still hurts to look at pictures of the rubble that had been our home.

I'm not suggesting we tear the old church down with a wrecking ball. My friend Christine Chakoian [wrote a great piece](#) called "Sifting Our Inheritance: What to Keep and What to Let Go." She rightly points out that we do keep some things. But we also let some things go.

Do we let go of the organ? If we did that at my congregation, that would be getting rid of something that many of our folk consider a prime marker of our identity. Do we get rid of committees? I would love to, and I would love to think creatively about how we would get our work done. I don't think anyone would mind having one fewer meeting to go to, but there would be anxiety in the in-between time. Do we let go of paid clergy? Shouldn't all of us pastor types be working ourselves out of a job? That's a terrifying thought.

When we made our last move, my husband, our daughter, and I loaded up our Honda Civic and spend four nights and five days driving from Wisconsin to Oregon. It was a great transition time. It was just the three of us and the clothes we needed for the trip and the things they wouldn't take on the moving van. We promised our daughter we would stay in motels that had pools so that she could go swimming every day. We visited the Badlands and Mt. Rushmore. We marveled at the open skies of the west. We listened to the *Wicked* soundtrack, over and over and over again. We were cocooned and in each other's company with no distractions. We needed that, after the hubbub of packing up and saying goodbye, and before the stress of starting anew and unpacking.

Maybe the church needs a cocooned, communal transition time, when we take with us only what we need for a short journey. We could do a little sight seeing, and we could sing, and we could find ways to refresh each day. Because there is a new home that awaits with all its own quirks. There will be boxes to unpack and recycle. There will be grief over what is no longer, and joy at what is.

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