

COVENANT

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Transitions: Dreadful or Grace-Filled Parts of the Journey?

Resilience: Navigating Acceptance and Change

Take a Moment to Breathe

Psychotherapy – The Gift of Accompaniment

ANNUAL APPEAL 2019

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Transitions: Dreadful or Grace-Filled Parts of the Journey?



When I began thinking about the theme of Transitions for this edition of *Covenant*, my mind immediately went to November 1989. It is thirty years ago since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and it is thirty years ago that I made a most profound transition from Bavaria to Berkeley (from the Archdiocese of Munich-Freising that celebrated 1450 years of its foundation, to the Diocese of Oakland that was just thirty years young at the time!). Thus, the fall of 1989 was a transition-themed year personally and globally.

At 22 years of age, I had made the decision to come to Berkeley, California for my "year abroad." Having grown up in a very protected, close-to-home environment, when the opportunity presented itself to study theology at the Graduate Theological Union in the San Francisco Bay Area, I jumped on it. However, little did I know that, after quickly falling in love with the cultural diversity, the level of lay participation, and the aliveness of liturgy in parish life, the Diocese of Oakland would become home. Coming to the West Coast of the United States as a young adult seminarian was a major transition for me. Finding myself away from the comfort of my family, in a new culture, practicing a new language, struggling with the reality of earthquakes, poverty, and violence at a level that I had never known, I was confronted with a sense of loss and uncertainty on the one hand, and a sense of excitement to embrace the new opportunity on the other.

Globally, in November 1989, the world witnessed the fall of the Berlin Wall, and with it the coming down of the Iron Curtain. The joy of seeing a country and families reunited also allowed many to learn about the 28 years of hardship that preceded this event. When the Berlin Wall was erected in 1961, entire communities and families were brutally divided, and for many of those years, there was no possibility to visit, no possibility to communicate by telephone or in writing, and people were thrown into years of hardship. Clearly, the families who suffered through the years of separation lived through a major transition; a transition that, even 30 years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, still has impact on German culture and politics.

Transitions can be traumatic for individuals and communities, and they almost always are a source of stress. They often are accompanied by symptoms of anxiety and/or depression and force us to deal with a sense of discomfort, exacerbate a sense of loss, and compel us to deal with change.

Transitions are a part of life and we all experience them. Clergy and Religious are not exempt from transitions, and some would say, experience more frequent transitions than others. Diocesan priests go through multiple parish assignments, moving from community to community, and men and women Religious frequently serve in communities all across Canada and the United States, and around the globe. Many of the Clergy who serve in Canada and the United States today come from various countries and cultures, and are asked to navigate a major cultural transition. Many dioceses and religious communities are dealing with an aging population, and many individuals are struggling with the transition into some form of retirement. Additionally, many religious communities have gone through or are in the midst of a merging process, uniting various provinces and regions, who often are unique and quite different in terms of customs, traditions, styles, and charisms.

In our work at Southdown, we have seen the best outcomes when we approach any issue from both the psychological as well as spiritual perspective. Psychologically, a transition can be characterized as "any situation or circumstance that alters a person's life in a substantial way, implying some level of role change or adaptation." (Maley, Pagana, Velenger, & Humbert, 2016, p. 1). Life transitions can be a source of personal growth, and at the same time, are sources of increased stress, placing individuals at risk for the development of psychological distress and clinically significant psychopathology (Praherso, Tear, & Cruwys, 2017). Marianna Pogosyan, Ph.D., a psychologist, writing a column on change-related stress, described the mixed emotional experience of going through a transition very well when she said, "It dwells on the continuum of excitement and anxiety, elation and dread, and depending on the hour, can leap from one extreme to the other" (Pogosyan, M., 2016).

Having learned much about the potential distress and the heightened emotions that are experienced in times of transition, we also have learned much about the protective factors that mitigate the impact of transition stress. These are the factors that are at play when we see some individuals pass through transitions with better outcomes than others. Positive psychology research has offered a variety of protective factors, such as resilience (Lally, 2018), perseverance (Peterson & Park, 2009), grit (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009), a sense of pride

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FEB
17-18
2020

Effective Leadership in Human Formation

This conference is open to religious and diocesan leadership and those directly involved in all areas of human formation for Clergy and Religious. Workshop topics will focus on assisting religious leaders to be resilient in addressing key issues and challenges that routinely arise in their ministry.

FEB
19
2020

A Resilient Life: Emotional, Spiritual and Physical Balance

This conference is open to all persons involved in diocesan and parish ministries. Workshop topics will focus on assisting individuals to be resilient in addressing key issues and challenges that routinely arise in their daily lives.

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Cont'd from previous page

and belief in oneself, healthy attachments, social-connectedness and involvement in a community (Werner, 2005), a sense of meaning and purpose (Frankl, 2006; Forman et al., 2007; Lally, 2018), spiritual fortitude (Tongeren et al., 2019; Aten, 2019), and other aspects of spirituality and faith (Maley, Pagana, Velenger, & Humbert, 2016).

As people of faith, we are blessed to have spirituality as a major resource to help us manage life's transitions. I have found the following words of advice from Daryl Van Tongeren (2019), who actively does research on the value of spiritual fortitude, very helpful. He believes that we can cultivate such fortitude by (a) committing ourselves to a deeper engagement of our spiritual beliefs and practices during adversity, (b) surrounding ourselves with a supportive spiritual community, (c) allowing our spiritual beliefs to be shaped, in part, by the reality of our hardship (i.e., a willingness to revise beliefs that simply do not hold up to reality), and (d) embracing the difficult times in life and allowing this pain to help us do the hard work of growth.

Not to over-simplify the complexity of these research findings, we can say that many of these factors are intrapersonal, located within each individual, and many are interpersonal, located in the relational context of each person. Each one of us has the power to foster these protective factors, those that lie within ourselves and those that depend on our social connectedness by active, intentional, courageous, open, and hope-filled engagement with life. A solid prayer life, grounded-ness in God, active participation in a church community, involvement in spiritual

direction, and utilizing psychotherapeutic offerings can all be of great help in the process of transitioning. This edition of *Covenant* provides strategies to foster physical well-being and resilience in the midst of change.

Allow me to conclude with the words from Psalm 121 that always help me in moments of transition and life changes. These words remind me to ultimately trust in the healing and protective power of the Lord, who has promised to accompany us always. Embracing the strength that emanates from this belief can help turn a life transition that may be dreaded into an opportunity of grace.

Our help is from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.

*The LORD is your guardian;
the LORD is your shade;
he is beside you at your right hand.
The sun shall not harm you by day,
nor the moon by night.*

*The LORD will guard you from all evil;
he will guard your life.
The LORD will guard your coming and your going, both now and forever.*

Gratefully,

Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D., C.PsyCh.
(Interim Autonomous Practice)
President and Chief Psychologist

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Resilience: Navigating Acceptance and Change

Eran Talitman, Ph.D., C.Psych.



Resilience has been defined as the capacity to face, overcome, be strengthened by, and even be transformed by experiences of adversity. Our capacity to be resilient is based upon both internal factors (i.e. personal history, personality) and situational factors. As a result, we may be resilient in one situation but struggle in another. It is important to note that being resilient also means that we will experience emotions as we face challenges in our life.

Research indicates there are many factors that enable us to be resilient. Social support, optimism, self-confidence, regular exercise, forgiveness, and gratitude for the blessings in our life all contribute to being resilient. However, the notion of acceptance and change can be particularly difficult for us.

Acceptance is a vital skill in the development of resilience and refers to our willingness and capacity to accept life exactly as it is rather than attempting to fight, control, or manipulate ourselves or others. Although it is very easy for us to intellectually recognize we are not perfect, it is emotionally difficult for us to accept that we can hurt people, we can feel rage, jealousy, or lust, we can engage in unhealthy behaviours, or we are not physically attractive in some way. Moreover, it is emotionally difficult for us to accept being powerless to change some aspect of ourselves, others, and the world. Accepting and embracing our brokenness or imperfections with gentleness, compassion, and courage allows us to reduce our sense of shame. As well, focusing on what we can control and letting go of what we cannot leads to a sense of efficacy and avoidance of frustration, hopelessness, and resignation.

The centrality of change in our life can also be very difficult. Change inevitability requires us to mourn our loved ones who have passed. Change requires us to accept that our bodies are transforming and becoming increasingly frail. Change requires us to let go of our comfort zone and embrace new technologies, new perspectives and new approaches. Change requires us to embrace the four seasons in our life and the ebb and flow of our emotions. Change requires us to accept that there is no such thing as being happy on a constant basis.

Strategies to enable us to integrate acceptance and change into our life can include:

- **Social support.** Social support allows us to process our thoughts and feelings as well as develop effective coping strategies. Social support can also reduce a sense of shame and isolation.
- **Self-compassion.** Show ourselves empathy, patience, gentleness, and encouragement. Recognize our humanity as well as that of others.
- **Gratitude.** Be grateful for all the blessings in our lives to maintain a balanced perspective.

In essence, integrating acceptance and change into our lives requires resiliency. In this way, being resilient means we need to anticipate that our life's journey will include moments of joy, excitement, laughter, and intimacy as well as heartache, grief, and loss. With the assistance of people who care about us, we need to find the courage to embrace the difficulties in our lives with humility, patience, and self-compassion, rather than frustration, self-criticism, and judgment. ■

Take a Moment to Breathe Nadine Crescenzi

Certified WaterArt Instructor, Aquatic Rehab Specialist, Land Instructor

"Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being." Genesis 2:7



The first thing we do when we enter this wondrous world is take in our first breath of oxygen, without a thought. Breathing is instinctual—we inhale and exhale approximately 20,000 times per day. Like our heart rate, digestion, respiratory rate, and pupillary response, breathing is part of our autonomic nervous system and is controlled unconsciously.

When we experience intense emotions, our breathing pattern alters, resulting in short intakes of oxygen and even hyperventilation. When our primitive instincts sense a threat, our sympathetic nervous system spontaneously reacts, activating our "fight-or-flight" response. The release of stress hormones, epinephrine and cortisol, increases our heart rate, respiratory rate, blood pressure and body temperature and change our pupillary dilation, innately preparing us for an altercation or escape scenario. When stress is perpetually present, our sympathetic nervous system stays activated.

Overexposure to stress hormones has immense negative impact on our body and health, contributing to anxiety, depression, digestion problems, headaches, heart disease, sleep disorders, weight issues and cognitive impairment. Awareness of our emotions, anxiety and heightened reactions enable us to respond

more effectively—by controlling our breathing—ultimately calming our nervous system. This ability builds resiliency and we come to realize we have more control over our reactions than we might have realized.

Research has shown deliberate, controlled inhalations and exhalations, at an optimal count of 5-in and 5-out, reduces blood pressure, heart rate, respiratory rate and stress, improving oxygen to the brain, memory, emotions, immune resiliency, energy, relaxation, focus, positivity, digestion, and cognition. Deep breathing for 15-20 minutes a day increases oxygen in the bloodstream and every cell in the body, improving mental and physical stamina, relaxing our muscles and releasing tension. Mindful, intentional breathing releases endorphins and improves lymphatic detoxification and overall our wellbeing.

For centuries breathing has been used as a meditative tool. Controlled breathing engages the parasympathetic nervous system and counteracts our "fight-or-flight" response, restoring us to a calm state. By mindfully slowing the rate and increasing the depth of our breath, we can change the way we feel, altering our thoughts, emotions and responses. Taking a moment to participate in controlled breathing allows us an opportunity to connect with ourselves, observe our emotions, and relax our mind and body. It is a chance to focus on where we are right now. By consciously changing our breathing, we can change our overall perception and increase a substantial sense of inner peace. ■

Psychotherapy – The Gift of Accompaniment

Rev. Stephan Kappler, Psy.D., C.Psych.
(Interim Autonomous Practice)



In the last *Covenant*, we recalled the invitation by Pope Francis to practice the “art of accompaniment,” which invites us to remove our sandals before the sacred ground of the other (*Evangelii Gaudium*). In our experience at Southdown, we have witnessed time and time again how the process of psychotherapy fulfills an essential role in the ministry of accompaniment. While some might critically view psychotherapy as an activity that takes away from the Sacrament of Reconciliation, I like to use the sentiment of Victor Frankl (2006), who expressed that while the aim of religion is the salvation of souls, the aim of psychotherapy is to contribute to the “healing of souls” (p. 163).

Psychotherapy provides a sacred and safe space—a space in which the individual will not be judged, but met with empathy. Carl Rogers (1957) early on identified three essential components of

psychotherapy that have held true, no matter what psychotherapeutic technique is used: unconditional positive regard, accurate empathy, and sincere genuineness. Present research on psychotherapy has found that clients greatly benefit from being supported, validated, and affirmed. Clients report valuing the opportunity to speak openly and honestly about their emotional experience, and they express appreciation for being challenged in order to adapt one’s thought process or to gain a new perspective (Chui, Palma, Jackson, & Hill, 2019).

In my own personal experience, I have found psychotherapy to be of great value in my own journey of growth. Whenever I can, I encourage people to seek out what Irvin Yalom (2002) describes as the gift of therapy. Asking for help is not a sign of weakness; it is a sign of strength, and we would do well to affirm one another in our efforts to seek opportunities for the healing of souls. ■

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Southdown North York Services

Michael Sy, Ph.D., C.Psych.
Outpatient Services Team Leader



Southdown’s Outpatient Services Program is an important component of our continuum of care. For more than 50 years, Southdown has remained dedicated to this ministry of accompaniment to Clergy and Vowed Religious. In response to requests for a need to be more centrally located, we are pleased to announce the expansion of our Outpatient Services Program to a second location.

Our new Southdown North York Services, located at 245 Fairview Mall Drive, Suite 608, is easily accessible by public transportation, with free parking available onsite. Services are customized

to meet the unique set of needs and circumstances of each individual and can include individual and group psychotherapy, addiction counselling, and consultation services. As well, a support circle for lay survivors of clergy sexual abuse is being developed.

In response to ongoing requests for services for the many dedicated lay men and women who work as professional Lay Ecclesial Ministers in our parishes, we are pleased to offer Southdown North York Services to these ministers. For consultation or to schedule an appointment, contact 905-727-4214 or administration@southdown.on.ca. ■

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Covenant is produced and published by The Southdown Institute. Its purpose is to inform and educate the readership about clinical issues that surface in our work and to invite integration of the emotional and spiritual aspects of our lives.



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