



WABASH CENTER

For Teaching and Learning in Theology and Religion



What They Don't Tell You About Transitions Being Different Than Change

Emilie M. Townes, *Vanderbilt University/The Divinity School*

Blog Series: Embodied Teaching

June 12, 2023

Tags: embodied teaching | Aging | Transitions | Change | Relearn | Unlearning

I have been learning over the last several months that transition is not the same thing as change. Change is something I live with every day as I battle the side effects of diabetes—not ever knowing if my feet will betray me or my hands remain cold all day. Change is a part of my life and living as I see new things from the folks I work with everyday, but then there is a quirk of phrase, the sidelong look, the slight roll of the eye that I had not seen before. Change is something I am trying to make my peace with as I age and get closer to the ages that my parents died, and worry, what this will mean for my spouse and my only sibling, my sister, who is managing mental illness in magnificent ways. Who will be their confidante? Who will be their big sister?

As I prepare to leave the deanship at Vanderbilt Divinity School, I am very aware that this transition thing is a whole 'nother thing altogether. Because it means that I can't just react to my disease and try to stay on top of it. I can't just acknowledge that there are some physical acts that I used to do with ease and now, if I can do them at all, they do not come easily or look slightly askew. Transition means that I am leaving something I've done and loved but realize that it is time to move on. It is bitter and it is sweet. And there are large parts of the future that I do not know about but have a dim awareness that they are out there. There is only so

much I can know about what the full textures of this transition will be. So, I make to-do lists in my head, in print, and then talk about them with the folks in my life and I say over and over again that I am looking forward to what this transition will mean. But I suspect that a part of me is really only doing this as a profound exercise in hope. Because I do like control and order and there is simply the unknown until I walk into this transition each day, hoping that it will be alright and that I do lead well until I no longer carry the marvelous responsibility of my school in ways that only the dean can. And what little I am sure of is that I am looking forward to full-time classroom teaching after a long sabbatical but it will be like learning to ride that bike again. Only this time it's electric.

<https://www.wabashcenter.wabash.edu/2023/06/what-they-dont-tell-you-about-transitions-being-different-than-change/>