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Reaching a new, unexpected stop on a faith journey

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I just started teaching high school Christian sexuality. I know, go figure: I had no idea that this would be in my future.

So I thought about how I got here, how I was led to this moment. This time last year, I found myself ready for another adventure in ministry. I was beginning my full year residency in Clinical Pastoral Education at a major hospital in San Francisco. I completed an extremely thorough application process that included incredibly personal reflections on my ministry and my life. Then I interviewed to be a part of this cohort group of professional ministers and practitioners from a variety of faith and spiritual disciplines.

Working alongside doctors, nurses, social workers, rehab therapists and others sounded good to me. I looked forward to learning more about the hospital and the entire process of health care. Nervously, I anticipated the responsibility of being the only chaplain on-site during my on-call shifts when a cardiac arrest, a birth, a sudden death or a lonely distressed patient could require my full attention and skillful support.

I learned my new travel route to and from the hospital via public transportation, grew excited to make my lunch and use my new travel tote to keep things fresh, and sported a new backpack that had enough room for my colored pens, prayer books and folders for all the learning I would be immersed in each afternoon.

Over the course of the year, I learned a great deal about self-care, but not the simple "I get a massage regularly to take care of myself" or "a nice latte helps me put everything perspective." I learned that self-care requires a lifestyle shift, not just superficial and temporary remedies. What a transformative experience it is to learn about how family systems theory plays a role in the way I process and access grief as well as how I can best support others during these key, pivotal moments in their family's life. Self-care is a thoughtful, deliberate lifestyle that sought the best outcome for all of me and all of the people I come in contact with.

I continued to learn the importance of ongoing education and formation and how I want to contribute to the future ministry and communities stricken by poverty.

Now, I find myself beginning my final week. Ten new professionals entered the doors of our hospital today. They, too, had to begin a new journey of discovery as they found themselves here and ready to be of service to those living with illness. So I write this knowing this chapter ends as my next one begins.

"Behold, I will do something new. Now it will spring forth; Will you not be aware of it? I will even make a roadway in the wilderness, Rivers in the desert." Isaiah 43:19

Teaching. Teaching 13- and 14-year-olds about relationships, adolescence and intimacy. Definitely something new! I can see where God is using my gifts and love for education in communities. I just continue to be baffled by God's mysterious and certain ways.

As a young voice, I reflect on my professional career, how following God and God's plan might mean not

having a career that comes with a retirement plan and consistent benefits. I think of how the job market has affected so many in our country and how the election will continue to generate much attention to businesses and the American way of productivity. The longest I have worked anywhere has been four years. I go from one experience to another, "graduating" and commencing a new role in a new place with new people.

Many young people of faith today find themselves living lives that may be satisfied by the choice of a greater purpose. I am not sure if a career lasting for 30 years will feed the creative impulse of this generation's nomadic spirituality and communal search for meaning and direction.

I did want to suggest that I am not the only one who finds herself educated, skilled, personable and influential, and moving from one job to another without a real sense of professional security.

Two facts are important here: increasing numbers of people in education and "delays" in life. First, the number of those enrolled in any two- or four-year college went from 4.7 million in 1963 to close to 17.5 million in 2005 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2007 [1]). Second, according to a June 28 article by The Associated Press, young adults are delaying careers, marriage and having children amidst high unemployment. Young adults find themselves "burdened with college debt or toiling in temporary, lower-wage positions, they are spurning homeownership in the suburbs for shorter-term, no-strings-attached apartment living, public transit and proximity to potential jobs in larger cities."

So I pray for my own spiritual journey to be open to God's goodness that is expressed through new possibilities and new realities. In order to do this, I must be open to letting go of my images of self and images of my future. I must trust that God's leading is enough. I need to remind myself that God cares for me and will provide for my needs, and that God does the same for us all. After all, God is making things new; are you not aware of it?

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[1] http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2008/2008022.pdf