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Serenity prayer often helps us deal with life

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Summer tends to be a time of transition and replenishment. One year of school has ended and another has yet to begin, and though work continues through June, July and August, almost all of us feel the change of pace, the shift in activities. More than in other seasons there are camps and conferences, picnics and parties, visits to friends and family, weddings and vacations. The sunny splash of the beach beckons, as does the coolness of the forests and the mountains.

Weekday work may not be so different, but regular schedules are relaxed, the precision of the kitchen replaced by the carefree delights of the grill, the glow of the television abandoned for the shade of a porch or a tree, the electric hum of air conditioning silenced on cooler days when open windows invite in gentle breezes. There is a sense of lull but also of activity — of pausing, but also of anticipation, enjoying the season for itself but also looking ahead to the fall.

Churches tend to go through their own time of transition and replenishment during the summer, too. Spring elections are behind us and new leadership roles are taken up; ministers and staff review, regroup and make plans for the coming year; formal religious education classes are in recess and instead there are camps and retreats for children and adults alike.

Those who have studied such things tell us that most "church shopping" takes place during the summer, when families in particular look for spiritual homes where they can feel part of a supportive community, where their questions can be answered and their answers can be questioned, where they can join with those of like heart and mind to give thanks and build the common good.

Sometimes summer's transitions are bigger than usual. There may be a new school, a new job or even a new career, perhaps accompanied by a move of many miles. Such changes, even if deliberately chosen, are often bittersweet, the promise of the new offset by the absence of the familiar, the excitement of possibilities for the future dampened by the distancing of the comforts of the past. If unchosen, they bring with them feelings of loss and regret, perhaps fear of the unknown, and usually anger at the causes of the unwanted changes. Change, though, is inevitably a part of life, and there is no escaping it; indeed, it is a major part of life and since most changes, large or small, are not chosen, it is in how we respond to change that we do our living.

The Serenity Prayer is a well-known expression of what it might take to do that living, appealing as it does to "the serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the courage to change the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference." I have kept a copy of this prayer pinned to the wall above my desk since I was a child, finding in its simplicity a deep wellspring of hope that I had not encountered elsewhere. As an adult, I have come to recognize and appreciate the power of being in a community that brings life to that hope, that fosters in us wisdom, builds in us courage, and nurtures in us serenity. We do our living in response to change to the extent that we are resilient — able to bounce back from all that our world throws at us, able to give thanks for the simple gift of life and all its challenges and graces alike — and we are so much more resilient when we are, as individuals, joined in community with others. Families and friends, colleagues and congregations, all can offer us the love we need in our daily lives to not just survive, but thrive.

May you enjoy replenishment of life and the spirit in these summer months, in yourself and in the company of those who bring joy to your heart. If you are in transition, may you find those who will comfort, support and encourage you, never able to do your living for you but still accompanying you on this journey of faith, hope and love that we call Life. And, with a song in your soul and a smile on your lips, may all your days be glad.

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