



UNIVERSITY PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH CHRISTIAN FORMATION

INTRODUCING ACT III

“Act III” is that part of life that may be viewed as a time of reaping, of fulfillment, but also as a time of radical change, of diminishing strengths. It is a time for looking back with clear eyes at who we have become, and a time of looking forward with hope to what we may yet become with and in Christ.

Act III has no official beginning time, but retirement is a marker for many. Whenever life takes a radical turn and we enter a new way of being, we have entered Act III. Though this time of entry may vary in terms of age and attitude, the end of this stage of life—to be clear and blunt—is death. In the Christian faith, however, as T.S. Eliot says, “In our beginning is our end, and in our end is our beginning.”

Act III should not be viewed as a long preparation for death. It is not a time of living in the valley of the shadow, though we may be called into that valley many times. It is a time for letting go of many things we once valued, or were bound to, but which have now become burdensome. It is a time for holding on to what has been good, and true and beautiful; it is a time for gratitude. Dag Hammarskold said it in this brief prayer: “For all that has been, Thanks. To all that shall be, Yes!”

What, then, does our church have to offer to those in Act III? We have tried to be attentive to the spiritual and emotional needs of our community in childhood, in youth, in young adulthood, in parenthood, in maturing adulthood. What are we offering to those in older adulthood as they face the life changes that mark every stage of life?

When we consider the needs of the children in our church, we respond, not with just a series of activities, but with a Children’s Ministry, a more holistic approach to helping children begin their growth in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord. This approach is needed at every life stage: a ministry, not just activities, however helpful they may be. A ministry for older adults must also be a two-way street, where their needs are recognized, but also where their service is valued and expected. It is a time to explore “adaptive discipleship.”

Here is a challenge to our church: To use the people and resources available to us, by grace, to develop a deep and broad ministry for older adults that strengthens them in their faith and supports them in their unique call to discipleship. To meet this challenge requires work and dedication. If this is God’s work, we will have what we need.

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