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Have you ever watched swimmers getting ready to enter a pool? Some can hardly wait to get into the water, so when they arrive at the edge of the pool they jump right on in. They may hop up from under the water, smiling and yelling to the others alongside the pool, “Come on in. The water’s fine.”

Others alongside the pool dangle their legs in the water, trying to discern the temperature of the water. After sitting and watching for a while, they slowly begin to lower their bodies into the water, a little at a time, walking deeper and deeper into the water until they have joined the others in the pool.

A third group sits near the pool, watching the others, and finally manages to dip their toes into the water, possibly exclaiming, “Brr. The water’s cold.” They retreat away from the pool, sitting elsewhere and avoiding the water. Later they may dip their toes into the water, then sit by the pool dangling their legs, and then maybe slowly ease into the water.

I often find myself dangling my legs or toes in the pool, waiting for a while to enter the water.

Once I’m in the pool, the water does feel fine, and I may wonder what took me so long to jump in.

Researchers have observed that some people try new ideas quickly, calling them early adopters. If you like trying the newest technology or clothing fashion before it’s popular, you’re like those pool jumpers who get in right away.

The majority of people wait to try a new idea, sort of like dangling their feet in the pool until they adjust to the temperature of the water. They want to see the experience of others, waiting for what feels like the right time to try something new.

The last group, what researchers call the laggards, wait until the last possible moment to try a new idea. They may resist getting a cell phone or computer, for example, or hang onto clothing that feels good but looks out of style.

In the early books of the Bible, Moses and Joshua appear to be the early adopters, ready to follow God into the water while others watched from a distance, wondering what they were doing. Moses led the people on their escape from the

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Pharaoh's slavery through the waters of the sea to safety on the other side.

In this morning's reading, Joshua is the early adopter, leading the people across the Jordan River. He instructed the priests to be the first ones to dip their toes into the water, stepping into the muddy river to carry the ark of the covenant, the sacred box that reminded them of God's presence.

The waters stopped flowing, and then the rest of the people crossed to the other side of the river on dry ground—they didn't even get their feet wet!

I find that story an illustration of how people sometimes operate in the church. When making a transition, some early adopters eagerly take ahold of the new idea, inviting others to join them, jumping into the water quickly and telling others, "The water's fine. Join me." Some sit carefully along the edge watching, but soon they enter into the waters of the new experience.

Others may dip their toes into the new idea, but then pull away and complain that they're not ready, who want things to remain the way they've always been. They tell the ones in the water to get out, to

stop swimming. If enough people complain and resist, the early adopters may get forced out of the water, while those resisting dig in their heels and ruin the experience for everyone.

In the congregations that make a transition smoothly, soon everyone gets into the water, embracing the new idea, and enjoying the experience together.

Without the early adopters of Central and First Christian Churches over the past 200 years, we might not even be here today. It took the vision of early leaders who met for worship in homes or schools to dream of creating a church building. Years later as spaces became unsuitable, other early adopters stepped forward to envision new spaces for worship and invited us to move to new locations. I imagine there were some who resisted, who wanted to remain in the old spaces, who didn't want to dip their toes into the muddy waters and try something new.

And now we find ourselves in yet another transition, bringing our two churches together. Some are eager to move forward and have already

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jumped into the water. Others sat alongside the edge, dangling their feet in the water but eventually jumped in. A few dipped their toes in the water and watched from a distance, while others left the pool altogether.

Those early adopters who have gone before us, the saints of our church who are no longer among us, have led the way though many of our transitions. They swam in the turbulent waters and the struggles, and now they rest along gentle streams and green pastures. They may have had their flaws and frustrations, but they also trusted in God's presence to get them through the difficult times.

It's not always easy to identify the saints of the past, or even the ones among us today. We may even have a difficult time trying to explain to one another what a saint is, as one boy tried to understand while traveling with his parents.

A couple took their young son with them on a trip to Europe where they visited many of the cathedrals on the tourist trek. When they returned home the little boy's Sunday school teacher asked him, "Did you learn what a saint is?"

He remembered the many stained-glass windows that depicted the Christian saints so beautifully, and he said, "A saint is [someone] who the light shines through."¹

I think that child's statement sums up what the church is all about—it's not about the stained-glass windows of our buildings, but about the light that shines through each of us. God's light shines in the lives of the early adopters who invite us into the waters, in the lives of those who quickly jump into the pool, in the lives of those who dip their toes into muddy waters, and even in the lives of those who resist getting in the water. May we continue to trust that when God invites us to dip our toes into calm waters or rushing waters, we never enter the waters alone.

¹ Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations*

for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers (p. 575). Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #525.