



July 2022

The Faithful God of Transitions

Life is a journey, and we all face major transitions at various stages of that life: a graduation; the birth of a child; a new job; the death of a parent—these are just a few of the common events that occur, when the transition from one chapter to another presents major challenges and opportunities. Christians can be glad to know that God walks with us through those times, providing support through family connections, the counsel and help of friends, a miraculous moment when things just “happen” to fall into place, or a simple Bible promise.

Most of you are already aware that we are now going through a particularly major transition into what is commonly referred to as “retirement.” In some ways, this has been rather forced upon us by the simple mathematics of age; I (Peter) will turn 70 early next year, and NEST policy requires that I not continue as a full-time professor beyond that arbitrary threshold. In other ways, we are choosing to embrace this passage into a new and mostly undefined period of our lives, as an opportunity to re-engage with our “home” country, and to connect more with family and friends there.

And so the process of this transition has begun here in Lebanon. It started with our final NEST Commencement service on June 11 (pictured top right), in which five very gifted and very committed young men from Lebanon, Syria, and Armenia made their own transition into an enhanced Christian ministry. I was honored to be invited by my fellow faculty to offer the Commencement address, in which I considered the pilgrimage of Abraham as a model for ministry. Soon after that, we joined David for a welcome vacation on the Kenya coast, at a relaxing resort which we’ve enjoyed several times in years past.



Peter delivering the Commencement Address.



On vacation in Kenya with David.

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Now, as we write this, our time is devoted to wrapping up our 9½ years of service at NEST—and our 40 years of RCA mission service in various countries of the Middle East and East Africa. For Patty, it means assisting our Librarian, Liza, with special projects that can only be done during the summer, and only with someone’s help. For Peter, it means packing away the resources that have served him well during his years of teaching, and which hopefully will continue to serve him in years to come. It also means saying many farewells (the hardest part) and being grateful for the guidance and support of colleagues and friends.



*Patty & Liza re-cataloging
NEST library books*



*Patty & Liza re-shelving
books in the Rare Book
Room*



Peter packing up his library for shipment

Yet this is only the first stage of our transition. The next stage will begin on August 7, when we depart Lebanon and arrive at our U.S. home near Richmond, Virginia. First we will begin readjusting to life in our condo and reconnecting with family members. Then we will embark on our final Home Assignment, hopefully visiting and speaking in all 23 of our current supporting churches—many of whom have faithfully prayed for us and financially partnered with us for almost all of our missionary careers. We have already planned much of that itinerary, arranged around the major fall holidays and the October wedding of Andrew and his fiancée, Anita. We expect this phase to last through February 2023, at the end of which official retirement from RCA Global Mission will begin.

What then? Well, this is where our comments at the beginning especially apply, since, for the most part, we don’t really know what this next chapter will look like. Oh, we have a few ideas—traveling to parts of the country we’ve never been; visiting old friends and enjoying some of the beauty of national and state parks; making some modifications to our condo; writing a book or two; and, especially finding ways to utilize our insights, experience, and gifts in some kind of service in our new context. We are very much aware of how much the U.S. is vastly different from when we first went overseas in September 1982. We have lived outside of our home country for 40 years, except for a three-year study leave back in the early ‘90’s, and short (and busy!) Home Assignments. We have observed the debates and polarization that have immensely altered the landscape of U.S. society, justice, and politics. We sometimes share with folks that we are not really “retiring,” but entering a new mission field—and perhaps the most challenging one yet!

So, dear friends, as you have faithfully prayed for us in the past and journeyed with us through many countries and ministries, we welcome your prayers as we explore what doors God will open (or close) for us regarding new opportunities for ministry. God has proven to be faithful through our various transitions so far; and to God be the glory for what he will yet guide us into, in his time and in his way.

Your fellow life-travelers in Christ,

Peter & Patty

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